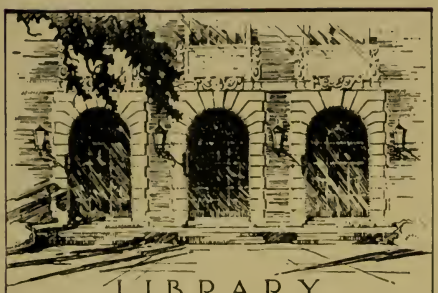

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MARY MYLES

'Tis only perfect faith that never tires,
An angel trust that murmurs "Come what may,
No fond regret shall tempt my feet to stray
From the strict path of mortified desires."
Though hearts are weak, lips need not so be liars.
Had there been any choice, I do not say
I should have chosen this dull rugged way,
This way of stones and flints, and wayside briars.
What then? I grieve not, faint not. God is kind,
He gives me strange sweet flowers that push between
The flints,—such as no garden ever bore:
And gathering these, how can I choose but mind
What thankful hearts have gleaned where now I glean,
What patient feet have passed this way before?

E. C. Lefroy.

MARY MYLES

A Study

BY

MRS EDMONDS

AUTHOR OF

"Fair Athens" "Hesperas" "Greek Lays"

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL II

LONDON

REMINGTON & CO PUBLISHERS

HENRIETTA STREET COVENT GARDEN

1888

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Miss Myles and Joe	1
II.	Chippenham Collegiate School	17
III.	Death of Dr. Grantham...	32
IV.	At the Vicarage	50
V.	Sir Robert Hanbury	63
VI.	The Old Spot	83
VII.	The Rehearsal	104
VIII.	The Meeting	128
IX.	The Rector of St. Mary's	156
X.	The Rector and Miss Myles	183
XI.	At Sunnyside again	200
XII.	The Two Old Friends	217
XIII.	At Southampton	231
XIV.	Concluding Chapter	267

CHAPTER I.

All things have grief at times. When high winds shake it,
The grove is grieved with plaintive murmurings;
So grieves the woodland bird when fowlers take it,
To feel the net encompassing its wings;
And so the heart when peace and joy forsake it
At Love's enravishment.

E. C. Lefroy.

One more look at the garden where she had passed so many happy moments, each leading up step by step to that supremest moment of all, when the young man's hands had imprisoned hers that held the marygolds in his strong and passionate grasp, and when her own love stood confessed before him. With true delicacy Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen had forborne to intrude their attentions upon her this morning, and had left her

for a few hours communing by herself. They had naturally considered that a fresh accession of grief would naturally be aroused on this, the last morning.

"That short-lived love affair, so recently torn up by the very roots, must needs leave some poignant memories in the heart whence it has been so ruthlessly plucked," soliloquized Mrs. Hazelhurst, with some touch of sympathetic sentiment in her heart; "it must take a little time to get over it altogether, although it was so absurd in both of them. They'll find out before very long that it was really an absurd business; and then their wounds will heal fast enough, as I do not think that there are any two persons in the world who would more dislike the imputation of silliness than Miss Myles and my nephew." So thought Mrs. Hazelhurst as she ordered the carriage to be in waiting, and without any comment quietly bade Helen prepare to accompany her. "It is the only courtesy that I can show her; silence and not words will better suit her present mood," and Mrs. Hazelhurst sighed involuntarily, almost dreading the approaching farewell.

But Mary had overcome. Although the night had been stormy the morn arose in sunshine. Love and peace had sung their benediction in her bosom with the returning light of this new day, for the onward path lay clear and well-defined before her mental vision.

One more look at the garden. The wicket gate was unfastened; she pushed it gently and went in. No one apparently had entered it, or trodden upon that walk since she had paused there awhile to strip off some superfluous leaves from her handful of marygolds before she offered them to her lover, and there they lay where they had fallen—scorched, dried up, and withered. She stepped over them and passed on. The hewn down trunk was lying in the same position in which it had been felled, falling with a crash as the sound of the gong met her ears. Splinters and chips were scattered all around. "Only four days ago," she said, softly, and her thoughts leapt with a bound to that half-dreamt-of heaven of free life and liberty, unshackled by conventionalities, in a far-off land. She recalled it, and the manly form of the young woodsman with his

uplifted axe and glowing face, but no trace of weakness was visible in her retrospective glance. She had gone through a fiery ordeal, and had come out purged of all dross. The future lay before, mapped out in clear decisive lines, and in that outlook there was no stain of self-seeking. She almost felt something akin to gladness that she had been strong enough to release her young lover, that she had of her own free will given the son back to his mother; she, who had held him in bonds stronger than life, had with her own hands, with her own lips, loosed him. For one moment, as she measured the wide gap yawning between that past dream of love and the dim future, her lips quivered, but only for a moment. She walked slowly towards the arbour. She would sit for a few moments on the log seat, and let her eyes drink in the whole scene, and then farewell for ever to the chestnuts with its hamadryad myth, to her garden and dreams of love; and welcome again the scholastic life, the scholastic calm. She put back the trailing boughs, but the seat was occupied by Joe—Joe, fresh from his native element, the muck heap.

"Joe!"

"I humbly ask pardon, Miss Moiles," cried Joe, springing up so suddenly that he almost performed a somersault in his endeavour to preserve his equilibrium. "I hadn't thowt you'd be a-coming here, miss; but I'm clean dazed abowt your going awaay, an' it's all throw Measter Stev'nson that I stan' afore you in this ploight. I ask Measter Stev'nson to let me off an hour t' morning just to make myself a bit tidy to come and give you my dooty, but a' wouldn't, and sent me off in a jiffey to the muck heap agen. 'The *musheroom* bed must be maade up at once,' he saay, and o' course I had to go; but I could na' work, I could na', so I throw it all oop and come here."

"Left your work, Joe?"

"I towld Measter Stev'nson straight off he'd better look out for some other helper who didn't moind being alleys ower head an' heels in the muck pit. I'd as lief be a *zanterpede.*"

[It is needful to state that Joe had been present at a lecture on natural history, which had been given during the previous winter for the express purpose of enlightening the aborigines, but the only residuum of which,

so far as Joe was concerned, was the single word "centipede," or, as Joe preferred to say, "zanterpede."]

"You need not have been so rash, Joe. I should not have left Sunnyside without bidding you good-bye."

"It goes kinder through me to hear you say the word, miss; and me an' you, so to speak, who've been at the work together. It wa' loike holiday-time a'most to come here an' get awaay from that —" Joe was nearly being committed to something very much like an oath, but he brought himself up suddenly with a snort. "Noa, a' didn't care nowt when I could come here nows an' thens an' have a real lady to talk with—thaar nowt all real ladies that goa by the name by a long waay, but you be a real lady—more loike a *serrafum* than owght else."

"Like what, Joe?"

"A *serrafum!* a *serrafum!*" cried Joe, with emphasis. "Bide wi' me jest the weight of a feather, miss; but you knaw the large winder at the church, jest over whar Measter Ashcroft reads out o' book? Thar be a lady in that winder wi' a blue gown tied round wi' a gold string, and wi' her hair

all crinkle-crankle, like a leaf o' wormwood, an' I alleys thowt her faace looked so good loike that many a time when Measter Ashcroft be a-preaching I've kept meself awaake by looking at it. One day I made bowld, and saay to Measter Ashcroft, I saay, 'Who be that lady, Measter Ashcroft?' It wa' when I took up the flowers for Easter, and Measter Ashcroft saay, 'It be one of the *serrafum*. Can't you see the wings, Joe?' Now, I never see the wings—they're folded all straight down her back, loike—an' I war alleys looking at her faace and the crinkly-crankly haar." Joe paused. "'Scuse me, miss, but if yow'll b'leeve me, the very first time you come here I saay to meself, 'That lady be jest loike the *serrafum* in the winder'—that's what I saay, miss. An' a real *serrafum* yow've been to me all through."

Joe's unusual effort at eloquence had brought a large amount of perspiration to his forehead, which, now trickling down, hung in suspended drops on his bristly red eyebrows. As, however, this flow of words had brought no remark from Miss Myles, who regarded him all through with a sweet gravity which seemed to discompose him

exceedingly, he suddenly broke out in a voice quite at variance with what the subject would seem to demand —

"I shall go and ask Measter Ashcroft to marry me."

"Marry you, Joe?" said Mary, gently. "Just now you grieved me by telling me that you had thrown up your place, and now you talk about marrying."

"There's nowt left for me to do."

"May I ask who you are thinking of marrying now that you are out of work?"

"A mawther who lives in a cottage anigh."

"Have you spoken to her, Joe?"

"Noa, but I've only to howld up my finger, in a manner o' speaking, an' I know the mawther 'll saay, 'Yes, Joe; an' gladly.' I haven't spoke, but I've wrote; an' if yow'll be koind enow as to gi' a look at it, as you be a roight great scholard, they tell me, I'll thank you koindly."

Joe thereupon fumbled first in one pocket and then in another. His pockets seemed to be interminable, and of such capacious dimensions that commodities of the most heterogeneous kinds were stowed away, and apparently lost for a time, for as he dived

down into them and brought up everything but that for which he sought, it was evident from his frequent change of countenance that the forgotten contents surprised him as they made their appearance one after another. At last, however, he succeeded in emancipating from a deep recess, where it had got entangled between a wisp of whipcord and a comb, a very crumpled and begrimed piece of paper.

Mary smiled as she watched him unfolding and smoothing it out with an air of pride and satisfaction.

"I am glad to see that it is not very long, Joe, as my time is getting short," she said, as she took the very unlovely paper from his hands.

"Noa," answered Joe, with evident satisfaction, "it's not long, but it's to the point, loike."

And Mary read —

"MOY DEAR,

"i will mary yow whan yow plus.

"JOE."*

"Bean't it now to the point, miss?"

* The above is a literal transcription of an East Anglian offer of marriage before the days of Board Schools.

"But you must not send it, Joe."

"I've nowt else to do," said Joe, sulkily, "'cept be a zanterpede."

"You must not do this, Joe. I should be grieved to hear you were going wrong, as I shall always take an interest in your welfare; but go wrong you will if you do anything so foolish as either of the two things you have just mentioned. Go back to your work, Joe, and trust to time. I may some day be glad to hear that you have risen from helper to be under gardener, and when that is accomplished it will be time enough to ask some young woman in marriage. Why, you are only twenty. In five years' time —"

Some sudden thought checked the conclusion of her sentence; but Joe was unconscious of any compelled reticence on her part.

"Foive years! foive years!" cried Joe.

"Go back to your work," resumed Miss Myles, in a lower and gentler tone; "I will speak in your behalf to Mrs. and Miss Hazelhurst. Miss Hazelhurst has long taken a great interest in this garden. I know that she will like to have it kept up as it is. I will ask her to put it in your hands. You

know well how to do everything here. Keep it up exactly as I should like it to be kept up. Fancy that I am still here."

"How am I to do that?" interrupted Joe, bluntly.

"By thinking every day whilst you are at work that I shall soon be back to see how you are getting on."

Joe gave a grunt of disbelief.

"See, now, there's work for you at once; to bring up that log you see yonder, that stump which Mr. Langridge cut down. Trim it up and place it side by side with this one."

As she spoke she lightly touched Joe's stubborn shoulder.

"Doan't you come anigh me, Miss Moiles; doan't come anigh me. I be nowt for the loikes of you to touch."

"I want your promise, Joe; your promise that you will go back to your work. If you do not like it now, yet in hopes of something better the work will seem lighter. It is your duty, Joe; but if that is not enough, go back for my sake—for my sake. And now good-bye, Joe."

She put out her hand.

"I fare kinder dazed, miss," said poor Joe,

huskily; "I doan't fare like as I used to fare. I doan't fare loike my own self."

"Never mind, Joe," said Mary, seeing his ineffectual attempts to rub one hand clean upon his corduroys. "Never mind. This is for moving the stump. Good-bye," and she thrust a sovereign into the rough, begrimed hand that Joe was holding back as too defiling for her touch. "Good-bye, and God bless you."

But Joe had fallen upon his knees and had kissed her feet.

It was about three weeks after the events just narrated had occurred that Mrs. Hazelhurst, whose house was now full of visitors who had been invited for the express purpose of banishing, if possible, those disturbing recollections, received the following letter from her sister —

"My Dear Kate,

"I would not write until I could give you something reassuring, a really firm basis whereupon you might rest content. Although I was never myself otherwise than confident as regards the ultimate result, yet I would not impart to you my impressions

until they were justified by facts. First and foremost then, Herbert has as much got over his late folly as if such a person as Miss Myles had never existed, which plainly shows that she is an intriguing, artful woman, who knew how to hold him in her toils, but whose influence or power required the constant machinations of visible presence, and vanished away like a fitful dream the moment that he was snatched from that baleful spell. When I reflect upon what might have been the consequence had Herbert been less straightforward and conscientious, I tremble; Miss Myles is just the kind of woman who might wreck the peace of any family. I now confess to yourself that she even began to work upon my own susceptibilities. The very look of her alone carries in it something of the force of an electrical current. I shudder as I recall it. How you could ever have a woman in your house possessing such subtle attractions it puzzles me to imagine. Why, she is exactly the type of woman which all history shows to be a subjugating power to mankind. Beautiful, gifted, and *unprincipled*, what more is wanting—except opportunities? And you could not see it. She was un-

doubtedly playing a deep game, posing as the prim governess with stiff white collar, etc.; but the topic is an irritating one which I have no pleasure in recalling. My lady doubtless thought that she had entrapped a wealthy fool of a boy who could be decoyed into a clandestine marriage. But enough of her. Herbert is too proud to confess his silliness, or to acknowledge his unfilial conduct in the affair, but he is evidently heartily ashamed of it. He is now himself again, wholly possessed with a noble ambition, and a desire to distinguish himself in the world's arena, and has suddenly in almost a marvellous way entirely thrown off the boy, and is a man with all the feeling of a man's responsibilities. He is changed; his self-reliance, formerly a quality in abeyance to my own wishes, has come to the front, and seeing how well it is working I do not feel as once I might, because he no longer appeals to me or consults me as formerly. This possibly results from the late conflict in his mind, but it is good. He is resolutely determined to walk alone, but the path which he has chosen is the one of all others which I should have preferred for him. The Indian Bar is his

choice; he is working terribly hard, too hard possibly, but I do not expostulate, as it is only the reaction consequent upon having temporarily yielded to lower impressions. I dare say the dear boy would be happier if he could bring his mind to make a clean breast of it, as they say, and thank me for my timely intervention. Sometimes he regards me fixedly for a few moments with so sad a look that I feel that if I gave him any encouragement it would bring him to a full explanation of how it all came about; but I think it better not to invite such disclosures. I am quite reconciled to his going to India, because it will place the wide ocean between them, not that I believe he would again succumb were he accidentally to meet her, but it is better to be on the safe side, and not risk a collision with so wily a woman. I may eventually go out to him; who knows? Hereafter *I* shall never allude to that odious business, so in future let it never be alluded to by yourself either by word or letter.

"Ever your affectionate and most thankful

"ELINOR."

"No, Elinor," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, as she quietly tore up this letter into minute

fragments; "no, I shall certainly never allude to it again. Complimentary! I cannot distinguish between a noble-minded woman and an adventuress, can I not? Miss Myles has annoyed me very much, but nevertheless I do know the ring of true metal when I hear it. If only she could have liked Dr. Grantham all would have been right!"

CHAPTER II.

Where is your kingdom? Within my own soul, where I keep all things in order; my passions obey reason, and my reason obeys God.

ST. ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI.

Dearest love, forgive
That I can think away from thee and live!

KEATS.

THE expected arrival of a new head and classical mistress in one, at the Girls' Collegiate School of Chippenham, was a subject which gave rise to much speculation among the different grades of people inhabiting that busy manufacturing centre and the suburbs thereof. What she would be like, both mentally and physically, engaged the thoughts of all interested in that high-aiming institution, whether parents or scholars. Of her personality nothing was known. She

had not been required to present herself before the Committee who managed all the funds and business matters connected with the school. They, on the contrary, had presented themselves before her, having made known to her for several years that the post was hers whenever she chose to accept it, but that the lady then officiating would stay on until such a decision was made, it being only considered a question of time, the age of Miss Myles having been hitherto an obstacle to her immediate nomination, as no head mistress was eligible under twenty-five, and a few years in excess of that minimum were even to be preferred. But this fact of age had not been allowed to transpire outside the ruling body, lest objections might be raised on the score of youth to the appointment upon which the Committee had set their hearts. All that was definitely known was that her name was Myles, which most of the younger part of the community had voted forthwith to be an ugly name, and, by a logical conclusion, considered that the lady owning such a name must needs be ugly also. It was not supposed, on the contrary, that she could be very old, from the fact of her having carried

off the honours at Girton College only a few years previously, and it was fresh in the memory of all that the Committee had announced with glee that they had secured the winner of the classical tripos for their mistress whenever the present lady principal should deem it advisable, on account of delicate health, to resign.

On Mary's side there was not much speculation as to what her future would be at Chippenham. There was her life mapped out before her in a daily routine, uneventful and placid. At least, that was the life which would meet the eyes of the outside world; but she had another life within her with all its pressing needs, and of this casket, closely locked up from every mortal eye, she alone held the key, and none but herself should unlock it. Henceforth, to live as if she had never met Herbert Langridge? That could hardly be, nor would she strive to attain peace by any such cold negation and repudiation of that sweet, but short-lived memory of love, but she would live—though away from him, separated by how many leagues, not of sea and land merely, but by other barriers that seemed insurmountable. Yes, she would

live, and, if she could attain to it, live nobly; she would not beat out her heart against a rock. Yes, she would live, as though it were possible that he might come to claim her the next week, and so for that coming she would be always in readiness, with house decked and garnished, nor gathering soil of time allowed to harbour in any nook.

Sitting alone upon the morning after her arrival in that neglected spot enclosed within four walls which went by the name of a garden, some sudden swelling of the throat and tremor of the heart was caused by the memory there conjured up of another garden, which, from one scene in it, one scene alone, was to her as the garden of Eden. With a proud effort she exorcised those futile, regretful reminiscences as an evil suggestion, and as the whisper of a demon of hysteria. The more healthy thought of present work to do, the enticing charm that comes to some minds in the consciousness of a power within, able to create beauty out of ugliness, and order from disorder, was aroused by the very dreariness which would have plunged many women so situated into the extremest slough of incapable despondency. All the old loves

came back linked hand in hand—guelder roses and musk roses, woodbine and gilliflowers, thyme, marjorum, and lavender, birds and bees, and a cherry tree for the starlings. It was far enough away from the chimneys to promise a fair return for any trouble bestowed upon it. By the time Mary had planted the whole space in her mind, and seemed already to hear it humming with insect life, and gay with the song of birds, her eyes showed a light in their depths which had not been kindled there for many a day, and a colour came and flickered upon her cheek like a harbinger of a not far-off time when again she would be thought of by men as too lovely to be the head mistress of the High School of Chippenham; which opinion would be promptly followed by a laudable endeavour to remove her to a sphere more worthy of her.

The space between four walls destined to become if not a garden, yet the best semblance of one which a pure taste could evolve from its possibilities, had done more than philosophic reasoning to dispel the sadness which Mary had felt upon her arrival at Chippenham. The rooms in the wing appropriated to her were large and airy, but the furniture was

stiff and formal. There was nothing anywhere either of that luxury to which she had been accustomed at Sunnyside, nor of the simpler elegance of her earlier home. The thought "I must make some alteration here," although a decisive resolve, failed to banish the feeling of dreariness and vacuity that oppressed her. "After Sunnyside"—Sunnyside, which in her waywardness she had hardly appreciated—"what is this?" The novelty of a town life, as it might be called, with a possible lack of refined and intellectual society condemning her to isolation, had weighted her mind heavily, in the prospect. She stepped over the threshold back into the house with a bosom somewhat lightened, as a bright-eyed damsel handed her a salver on which lay two cards—"Mr. and Mrs. Brereton."

That same night she wrote the following letter to Dr. Grantham, at Florence —

"Collegiate School, Chippenham.

"DEAR DR. GRANTHAM,

"You will hardly expect to hear from me so soon, but I feel it imperative upon

me at once to confide to you all that has transpired since you left. It may give you some transient pain—I hope, I trust that it will be but transient. Nevertheless, it is due to us both that I should at once write to you in truth and sincerity. I wish to retain your good opinion. I believe you to be all that is unselfish and good, but I dare not think that even your kind generosity towards me could survive if you had reason to believe that I had been guilty of falsehood and dissimulation towards you. You will perceive by the above address that I have suddenly left Sunnyside. As it is scarcely a week since you wrote to me you will at once think that something must have occurred to cause such a decision. You approved of my resolution to come here, but you expected that it would be delayed for perhaps some months.

"I hardly know how to open my heart to you, I tremble lest my communication may excite feelings prejudicial to your health, but if you do not learn it from me you will learn it from others, and it is better that you should know it from myself. I have reason to believe that our friendship, our mutual esteem, has not been snapped by anything that has passed

between us. On my side, so long as life shall last, I shall ever revere, and—yes—love you. I shrink not from using that word, and, therefore, I dare not—I dare not imperil the loss of your affectionate regard. So it is better that I tell you all frankly. When you read and realize how I have suffered you will be more inclined calmly to consider what I write, and you will believe me. I took your kind letter, brought to me by Mr. Herbert Langridge on the morning of your leaving Sunnyside, into my garden retreat to read. I read and reread it with tearful eyes. Do you remember your postscript? That postscript, those few simple words, merely a short praise of Mrs. Hazelhurst's nephew, brought a sudden light into my soul—it was a revelation! As I sat in my arched bower—you know it—I was conscious of a feeling hitherto unknown to me. I can hardly say that the discovery gave me pleasure. I was startled, almost annoyed, nevertheless it was there. Dear Dr. Grantham, through that postscript I discovered that I loved Herbert Langridge! I will not disguise from you that I previously knew that the young man had conceived an attachment for me upon our

very first interview, but I was indifferent, or supposed myself to be so. I solemnly declare, dear Dr. Grantham, that no thought of Mrs. Hazelhurst's nephew influenced me on that unhappy morning. As far as I then knew, I was heart free; I sometimes think so still.

"Stirred as I was by this new-born consciousness, I might yet have avoided the catastrophe that followed had not Herbert Langridge come that morning into my garden. In less than one hour we were engaged lovers.

"And now, alas! I have to confess to you what I would willingly conceal. Your own lips had told me that my tranquillity of manner and appearance, which you recognized as the garment that veiled a warm, responsive nature, had been my special attraction in your eyes. Ah, my dear friend! what will you say when I tell you that a few contemptuous words from Herbert Langridge's mother stripped off that garment, and that I gave way to undignified wrath and resentment. Never through my life had contumely in any form come near me; never had I any temptations to anger. I was proud of my fancied supremacy over the common herd in respect to those feelings; proud, too, of some poor

gifts, and having lived somewhat aloof from society so-called, I was unaware that any mother could despise me for her son—despise me!

"Through an agony of suffering from injured pride I came to a better knowledge; I gave up my newly-found love; we are parted—perhaps for ever; we are parted until the sanction of the mother who has devoted her life to her son is freely given, freely offered. I am proud still, so far; and I am here. Herbert and myself meet not again until his mother solicits me to be his wife.

"And now, dear Dr. Grantham, forgive me if you think that you have aught to forgive. Do not offer me pity; I do not like pity. I shall survive this sorrow, and already it seems that all bitterness has passed out of it.

"I pray for you daily that your health may be restored, and trust that you will enjoy visiting the beautiful lands in which you design to sojourn for some time to come.

"Ever yours, gratefully,

"MARY MYLES."

This letter found Dr. Grantham at his

sister's prettily situated villa, about half-an-hour's drive from the fair city of Florence.

How beautiful was the scene outspread before him! how glorious the golden sunlight, the lucid atmosphere! Afar off lay the city, whose many towers and spires were clearly defined against the blue sky. Dr. Grantham drew a deep breath as though he were drinking in a new life of health and happiness, when a letter was put into his hands.

He had been more than human if its perusal (when his not so long ago declared love and its consequent rejection by the writer be taken into account) had not caused him some agitation. His philosophy and reason had not as yet assumed altogether their rightful supremacy over feeling and emotion. The two well-known lines of the poet came vividly to him, so that at first it was not sympathy, but rather envy, that dominated him. The young man whom he had commended—a boy in the eyes of Dr. Grantham—had won the hitherto impregnable fortress of Mary's heart. The lovers, for very reasonable motives as viewed from any mother's point of view, were not to be united, as far as it appeared at present;

at least it was indefinitely deferred, and that was of itself a deed of separation for ever in the generality of cases when the lover was a youth of but twenty years old; unless, indeed, his character was an exceptional one.

This young man had seemed to him to have great promise, and now, as he mused over some circumstances of his meetings with him, he recalled those early morning visits, and particularly that one occasion when, having sent for him to his bedside in order that he might thank him personally for his attention, he had been surprised by the stammering and blushing eagerness with which the young man strove to assure him that it was for Miss Myles's sake only, she, who was naturally in such distress, and who was so anxious, that he came every day at early morn in order that he might carry to her the first welcome news. If, as it was now proved, the boy loved her then, but was under some misconception in respect to her feelings, how generous and noble it was to act as her servitor when his young heart was bleeding.

"He is worthy of her love," said the doctor to himself, "and he is rewarded; the love of

such a woman does not fall to the lot of one man out of a thousand once in a century."

So thought Dr. Grantham under the illusion of a not yet thoroughly conquered passion. Of the grief of separation at that moment he hardly took any account. If there were loss thereby it was far outweighed in his estimation by the gain of there having been mutual love; they were happy in that memory—although they were parted.

The question, however, was not one upon which he felt inclined to dilate, so in a very few words he wrote to assure Miss Myles that he could never at any time doubt that truth, which was so resplendent a feature in her character, and that he highly approved of the course she had taken in hastily leaving Sunnyside and assuming a position in every respect more suitable for her.

The curtain now falls. When it rises again ten years will have passed—ten years, with all their changing seasons of springs and summers, autumns and winters. The scenes will not have been shifted. Upon the actors only in this simple drama of every-day life will changing time have set its seal.

To look forward for ten years at certain epochs of life seems an eternity. To the boy or girl what does it not signify? Seldom do they, however, care to realize what ten years may bring forth. Through all the bright visions which hopeful youth may conjure up as attendant upon the future, there will yet creep in unbidden the shadow of a phantom guest which seldom leaves a homestead or family circle unvisited for ten years.

To look back for ten years, to some ardent ones in the full flush of strength and courage may be a kind of triumphant record of how they have stepped firmly from stone to stone in the steep ascent to success, and never once slid in all their climbing. Brave souls! over whose paths it seems to have been written that the besetting dangers should be to them as naught, as though they themselves were pre-ordained to be beacons for the faint-hearted and stumbler, bidding them to take courage by their example, for it was not so difficult after all.

Oh! men and women sure of foot and keen of sight, having no tremors and misgivings, rejoice that you miss not your path-

way between the rocks; but be careful also to keep your beacon lights well trimmed that they may show a clear and steady flame to those weaker ones who follow in your foot-tracks!

CHAPTER III.

Life! I know not what thou art,
But know that thou and I must part,
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.
Life! we have been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time;
Say not "Good-night," but in some brighter clime
Bid me "Good-morning."

MRS. BARBAULD.

DR. GRANTHAM lay on his death bed.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you, dear friend?" asked the Vicar, who, sitting by his bedside, held one of the sick man's hands between both his palms.

Mr. Ashcroft had been for more than an hour receiving at intervals last messages, which he was charged to deliver to the wide

circle of college friends and literary associates among whom the doctor had passed so large a portion of his almost unchequered life.

"Is there anyone else?" repeated the Vicar, gently.

"The little governess," gasped the dying old man.

"Who?" said Mr. Ashcroft, tremulously.

"Mary Myles."

"What of her, dear Dr. Grantham?"

"What of her!" There was a long pause, some struggling emotion made breathing difficult. "Everything of her!"

"You mistake me," said Mr. Ashcroft, tenderly; "I meant what is the message you wish that I shall convey to her?"

"No message! no message! no message to Mary Myles."

The Vicar made no reply.

"I must see her once more before I die! Once more! only once more! Telegraph to her to come to-morrow—to-morrow. Pray that I may be spared until to-morrow. When I have looked once more into her face then, O Lord, Thy servant can depart in peace!"

Still the Vicar made no answer; but his countenance showed the doubts and per-

plexity which were struggling within him. The name of Mary Myles had not passed between them for ten years.

"Why do you not answer, Charles?" said Dr. Grantham, and a faint smile struggled to the surface. "Be not afraid, she will come."

The thought in the good Vicar's breast was —

"Ought she to come? ought she to be asked to come?"

"She will come," repeated the doctor, in a more resolute tone. "I have no fear that the black sail will be hoisted, though ten years ago I was too old to be her Tristram. She will come to bid the old man 'Farewell' before he goes hence."

The Vicar looked still more troubled.

"How cruel it was!" murmured the dying man. "'They ben black as pitch ben their hue,' and the sails were white! the sails were white! How cruel!"

"His mind is going, he is wandering," said Mr. Ashcroft to himself.

He had never read of the loves of Tristram and Ysolde, nor Sir Walter Scott's clever restoration of a sequel to the fragment of the old romance, and he sighed in compassion

for the (to him) most perceptible aberration in the mind of his dying friend.

The sick man raised his hand as if in expostulation. His breath was laboured. In broken and fainter accents he articulated, "Send for Mary Myles to come to-morrow," and lay back exhausted with closed eyes.

"As you wish it, my good friend; I will go and telegraph at once," said the Vicar, and he pressed the hand of his old comrade as he rose.

"She will come," said Dr. Grantham, as if to himself, opening his eyes, which gleamed with a strange light.

As the Vicar hastened to the Post Office he thought: "Is it possible? Has that fancy for Miss Myles lingered in the old man's heart all these years? What a pity! What a mistake it all was! Well, she was one in a thousand—that's true. How graceful she was! and that something in her look! I never could make it out; but no one could resist it," and at this point Mr. Ashcroft indulged in some retrospections which might have been interpreted by maligners that he, too, had been under the witchcraft of the lady

whom he had once likened so strangely to Circe. "What a pity it all was!" said the Vicar, resuming the chain of the thoughts which he had let drop whilst recalling Mary Myles's steady grey eyes and classically poised head. "An old man like that, and ten years ago!"

Mr. Ashcroft was a devout Christian priest; he was also a true and kind husband, but he had never had any romance. His own love affairs had, from beginning to end, been smooth and unexciting. No clouds of doubt had dimmed the horizon when he had determined to ask for Lucy Dawson's hand. He knew she loved him, and knew that no objections would be raised by either family to the union. His married life had been a fitting sequel to his calm, unimpassioned courtship; a peaceful content in the plenitude of earthly happiness, according to his standard, had been fulfilled.

"A sweet woman, certainly—a very sweet woman! With such talents as she has—a remarkably sweet woman! I always thought so myself—always." With his mind still alternating between the enthralling fascinations of the lady in question and the strange

and unwonted persistency of an old man's love, the Vicar found himself at the door of the telegraph office, and for the first time considered what form the message which he had undertaken to send should take.

"What am I to say?" was the perplexing idea uppermost, with the full belief impressed upon his mind that the request about to be forwarded was ill-judged and out of place.

"It will distress her beyond all measure," he mused; "not only will it bring back to her mind all the old buried past, but the very necessity of a refusal which it involves will cause her exquisite pain; and I—what am I to say when I carry back to my poor friend what, in his state, will seem so cruel? Why, it will kill him outright if he be in a condition to understand it, for he was, surely, wandering this morning! Whatever did he mean by 'sails black as pitch ben their hue?' I'll swear that was no quotation from Homer."

It was, therefore, with a mixed feeling of grief and annoyance that the Vicar telegraphed to the Head Mistress of the High School, Chippenham —

"Dr. Grantham is dying. He wishes you to join him in his last Communion to-morrow, noon. Will you come?"

When a real or imagined duty, the accomplishment of which is most distasteful to the doer, is over and done, the mental atmosphere generally clears again at once, and Mr. Ashcroft, whilst sitting in the office awaiting the answer to his telegram, felt considerably relieved. His thoughts flew back, forgetful of the present moment, to the old friend of more than forty years, whose term of life was hovering in a minute's balance; perhaps even now the fragile cord might be already snapped.

"Who can tell?" said the Vicar, in a low voice, as, stirred by these feelings, he rose up and began impatiently to pace to and fro. "Who can tell? To-morrow! The sands of life have so nearly run out that it is a question if he be here to morrow."

This thought, with all the pain which it involved, again brought back the reason of his being where he was. No answer had been returned as yet, and the time was overdue when it might have been expected.

"I must evade giving the poor fellow a

direct answer," continued Mr. Ashcroft, with a blank look. "I cannot tell him that no answer was returned," and then he bethought him of the vexed question of expediency, or truth at all times and at whatever cost, whosoever may be slain by its declaration; and he got involved in a tortuous mesh about how he could steer in equivocating so as to avoid a direct falsehood, when the answer was given to him —

"I will come."

"God bless me!" cried the Vicar, startled out of his usual propriety, "how extraordinary! But like her," and his heart was lighter than his feet as he trod his way back to the bedside of his dying friend.

Dr. Grantham had a refreshing sleep, and a bright look of gratitude greeted the Vicar.

"The sails ben not black, eh, Charles?" he said, softly.

Without heeding the allusion to the "black sails," which had been such a puzzle to him before, and seeing clearly that there were no signs of delirium in the good doctor's countenance, he contented himself with saying simply —

"The answer is: 'I will come.'"

"I knew it," said Dr. Grantham, softly. "God bless her!"

The softened golden light of noontide on one of the last days of a fine September shed through the open casements and unshaded windows of Dr. Grantham's chamber a refulgent glow that lit up the whole room with a kind of glory, a foretaste, as it were, of the eternal sunshine whither the soul of the good old man was hastening.

"Draw back the curtains—more light—more light" told all those assembled—all those who had been often present at similar scenes—that the summons had come. Many who have heard those words from dying lips, when the shadows have been closing round and the eyes have been darkened, have taken those simple words as meaning a spiritual signification. The demand of the sufferer for light—more light—tells us rather that the Angel of Death is close at hand. Draw back the curtains, then, oh watchers by the death bed, let in the golden light of day to gladden once more the fading eyes!

On the window sill a squirrel was nibbling nuts. He had been a constant visitor there during the whole summer, for the kind old

doctor had taken to himself the idea that this particular squirrel was old like himself—a tired wayfarer in life—although his coat was as thick as ever, and his eye as bright as any of his brothers; but this idea was rooted in the doctor's mind, so a small heap of nuts already cracked were daily provided for him; and one of the many consolations of the invalid was to watch his "happy little friend" at his diurnal meal.

"Good-bye," said the doctor, smiling. "Tell Joe to see that little Brownie is never forgotten. That's one message I forgot yesterday. Poor little Brownie! I don't want him to miss me."

The room looked so bright and cheerful with the flowers arranged by Mrs. Ashcroft, which were none the less bright for the tears which had fallen upon them—tears hallowed by the tender memories of long years, of an unbroken friendship, and now about to be gently sundered for awhile.

There was some little anxiety visible on the Vicar's countenance as he glanced first at the evidently fast waning strength of the dying man and then at his watch, which already showed that some minutes

had elapsed since the time at which Miss Myles was expected.

"Were it not better to begin the service," he thought, "lest —"

He unclasped the hand in which his friend's was held, and was about to rise, when the doctor whispered —

"Wait! she has come—she is here."

Pausing, and looking towards the door with an expression of wondering curiosity, there were a few moments of anxious suspense, when, unannounced, and in her travelling dress, Mary Myles softly entered the room.

"God has sent me my dismissal by an angel," murmured the doctor, and feebly raised his hand as a sign that the divine office should commence.

Only once during that most touching rite of the Christian Church did Dr. Grantham unclose his eyes. When the closing Benediction was uttered a halo of peace and happiness glorified his face with a spiritual beauty never before visible.

"Leave us alone for awhile, dear friends," he pleaded, looking towards Mary for the first time.

"We are near, the nurse and myself,"

whispered Mrs. Ashcroft, "if you require us," and Dr. Grantham and Miss Myles were left alone together after an interval of ten years.

"Did you think it a selfish thing, child, for an old man to send for you to come to his dying bed?"

Mary for answer knelt down by his bedside, and bending her uncovered head over the hand she held, gently touched it with her lips.

"In the very deepest depths of my heart, through all the long years which have passed since we last met—since we last met—the memory of you has been a fount of secret joy—of joy—child, not of pain. Take this thought to your heart after I am gone. I have never ceased to love you; I have never prayed once that I might cease to love you; but I have never ceased to pray that my love might be a hallowed one, and wheresoever I may find myself in the heavenly mansions, it is my trust that I shall never cease to love you evermore. For that gift of love which came to me, all unworthy as it was of you, was a light from Heaven, bringing a clean, warm soul to a poor dead body encrusted with

the leprosy of a cold selfishness. Without mother, or wife, or child, who can tell how strongly rivetted the chains of an engrossing egoism would have become, closing all entrance of a higher life? Mother, wife, child—you have embodied in yourself all those holy affections which redeem our lower natures."

"Dr. Grantham," said Mary, softly, "if it will bring you any consolation in this hour, know that you were never forgotten by me, but that day by day through these long years I have blessed you by name—you who, when suffering, had no word of blame or bitterness, although you were suffering through me."

"Through you? through you?" he answered, vaguely, as a momentary unconsciousness obscured his mental vision. "Still beautiful, still beautiful," he murmured, as his dimming eyes dwelt upon her face; "but where is he, the 'Venerande puer,' was it not thus the Vicar called him? The bridegroom tarryeth long."

The confused images of the sick man's brain touched the chords of her heart, and tears came into Mary's eyes.

"Yes, it is long, so long, dear Dr. Grantham, that at times I doubt if ever —"

"If ever, if ever; yes, the time is over long; but no one who has once loved Mary Myles ever forgets. Can then one whom she has loved, still loves, forget? No, it is not possible."

"There was a compact made with his mother, and Herbert Langridge was bound to fulfil it," said Mary, firmly.

"Mrs. Langridge died last year," answered the doctor, sadly. "Death has released him, and the bond is annulled."

"And the poor mother never saw her son," she answered, unheeding the suggestion. "Our love has been guilty of that wrong."

"No, Mary; love nor thinks nor works harm. It was self-love, selfishness, that wrought all that woe. Poor foolish, misguided mother," and overcome by emotion Dr. Grantham fell back.

"Speak no more of this, my dear old friend," murmured Mary, tenderly raising his head and administering a restorative; "let this sorrowful theme cease."

"You are right," and there was silence for a short space. "I will sleep now. Will you

watch awhile, my daughter?" said the dying old man.

Smiling acquiescence with tear-dimmed eyes, Mary smoothed the pillows and supported his head, and the sleep that so often precedes death, as if sent in merciful preparation for the last trying ordeal of the soul, fell over him. Now and then a few half-articulate words were murmured, scraps of old-world learning mingled with Bible texts; once, like as when a few chords struck on the harp-strings recall the whole struggles of a people, so did the words of the old Scotch song now hovering in broken cadences on dying lips thrill Mary's heart with memories of the past, and the gathered tears fell on the hand she held, as she heard though indistinctly —

> "Waly, waly, by the brae,
> Waly by yon burn side
> Where I and my love wont to gae —"

There was a rustling of leaves among the boughs as a little living creature swung itself on to the window sill, and broke the fitful slumber of the invalid, as it also aroused the attention of the watcher.

"Brownie! Brownie! Mary, are you there?" cried the sufferer.

Mary pressed his hand, a change had come over his face, and the brightness of the dawn before the day was upon it. He pointed to a cabinet, and fumbled at a small key hanging by a ribbon round his neck. Mary, divining his meaning, released it, whereupon he signed that she should bring the cabinet to him and unlock it. As the lid fell back she saw that it contained some antique jewels of great price, and upon them lay a faded bunch of harebells!

A half cry of pain and surprise escaped her as she recognized the form of the delicate stalks and the withered petals. In a moment all came back—the woodland glade, and the half revealed love as the shy youth tendered his gift of flowers, with the words "I was thinking of you when I gathered them," and the little blossoms which an accident had transferred into Dr. Grantham's keeping, were here cherished by him all these years. She wept silently, but checked the momentary outburst of emotion as the old man spoke again—

"My treasures—my best treasures—my mother's bridal jewels, and the harebells you once wore on your bosom. The first are

yours—to wear as a bride ; the last are mine —mine in death as in life. They shall go with me into the grave." Seeing that he was fast sinking, Mary was about to touch the bell, but a pressure of his hand arrested her. "No, I will enter the valley with thee alone by my side—with thee alone."

A bright light overspread his face.

"The bluebells—the bluebells; here, Mary, here on my heart—bonnie, bonnie Scotland," and then in broken and disjointed utterance came the half articulate words—"The winter is past—the rain is over and gone. In—manus—tuas—Domine."

His eyes looked at her wistfully, with their fading light.

"Kiss me—kiss me, Mary," he murmured.

Her lips touched his, and the warm tears fell upon his chilling cheek, as with one faltering word, "Nausikaa," the soul of the good doctor passed away.

And they were Mary's hands which with gentle touch smoothed the white hair which, still unthinned, fell round the ample brow of the great scholar. It was she who wove autumnal wreaths for the chamber of death.

"Let us leave the sunlight with him," she

said; "the rest of the house can put on its mourning garb, but here let there be light. Was it not light for which he lived?" And they let her have her way, knowing how the old man had loved her, and she laid the withered harebells on his breast and watched by him all that day, whilst little Brownie went and came and nibbled his nuts on the window sill, sometimes peering round with curious bright eyes as if he were seeking for a welcome from the kind old friend who in dying had not forgotten him, but had said —

"Let Brownie have his nuts as usual."

CHAPTER IV.

Safe, thou dark home of the dead,
Safe, O hide his lovèd head;
Keep him close, close in thine arms
Sealed up with a thousand charms.

RICHARD CRASHAW.

"HAS Joe Brunning left Sunnyside?" asked Mary later on in the evening of the same day, after she, the Vicar, and his wife had each given their loving testimony to the worth of him who had been just taken from them, dwelling upon each well-known attribute as the bereaved always love to linger over, and record the actions and ways of those who have been very recently removed. "Has Joe left Sunnyside? because I think that I met him this evening as I was leaving Braemar. I was rather startled for the moment, as I was flitting along, to come

suddenly upon a man with a lantern, just outside the second gate, on that narrow path. He stood aside, and stopped short, but did not speak, nor even give the customary salutation. By the flickering light which the lantern cast upwards upon him, I thought afterwards that the face thus dimly shown resembled what Joe might have developed into—at least it reminded me of him, but he evidently did not recognize me, and was apparently amazed at meeting a woman on that by-path at that hour, and alone."

"Yes, indeed," said the Vicar, "it was very wrong and self-willed of you that you would not allow us to fetch you."

"Perhaps it was self-willed, but I know every inch of the way, and my own thoughts were companions enough. But tell me, could it be Joe Brunning? Where is he living, and what is he now doing?"

"You will be glad to her that Joe has been living at Braemar for the last seven years. Fletcher, as you know, died unfortunately at Athens. He was imprudent, and he took fever there, and our old friend has often told us about the distress it occasioned him. He was laid to rest in the pretty English cemetery

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there, where the historian and Philhellene Finlay is buried; but his loss determined the doctor to return home at once, as I wrote to you at the time, although his health was better in Greece than elsewhere, for having thrown himself heart and soul into all the aspirations of the modern Greek life he had almost forgotten his ailments, but he could not endure to remain absent from home when his faithful Fletcher was no more, and upon his arriving home, poor Joe being then out of a place, he was taken on by the doctor, I expect because he remembered that he had been one of your *protégés*."

"Then I fear my former garden has reverted to its pristine state."

"I believe that Stevenson keeps it up after a fashion, but I have never seen it since you left. Joe did not altogether please Mrs. Hazelhurst apart from his frequent collisions with Stevenson."

"Poor Joe!" sighed Mary, "he has a good deal of stolidity in him, and requires a gentle but firm hand to guide him, or else he enwraps himself with a veritable porcupine hide of resistance; but what was his chief offence? Mrs. Hazelhurst is a kind mistress,

and Helen had taken so strong a fancy to my garden that I thought the thymy banks might have thriven under Joe's care alone."

"But you see, dear Miss Myles, that they were so much away, and perhaps it was left at first too much to his own devices; anyhow his chief fault was laziness!"

"Joe, lazy? Or was it not that Stevenson continued his tyranny in respect to the muck heap?"

"Well, no," said the Vicar, smiling, "it was not exactly that; but Helen told me herself that whenever anyone went to the 'Wilderness,' as it was called after you left, Joe was always to be found—now, where do you think?"

"Not in my arbour, surely?" said Mary, and a faint blush illumined her cheeks.

"You are just as sharp as ever," said the Vicar, with twinkling eyes, "to think of your making that guess! Yes, true enough. Poor Helen would take her book or her work, and sometimes at her persuasion Mrs. Hazelhurst would accompany her, and when they got to your haven of refuge, lo! Joe would be there sitting on your own log seat; yes, actually sitting, and of course Helen

could not deposit her silken skirts on the place just defiled by Joe's corduroys. This occurred several times, but the crowning sin was, that upon one unhappy day they both surprised him there with a pipe in his mouth and smoking, so he had to go forthwith."

"Poor Joe," said Mary. "Is he married? I promised to help him when he had fixed upon his wedding day, but I never heard from him."

"Oh, no," cried the Vicar, again smiling. "Joe is particular, he can't find anyone good enough for him. I think that he is looking out for a *serrafum*. I took him in hand after the pipe business, and had him here, and he did for us well enough, for he is honest, and sober, and truthful. I also appointed him to be gardener to the churchyard, and so between these two posts he did remarkably well, as far as wages were concerned, for he cleared between them five-and-twenty shillings a week, and began to increase his deposits at the savings bank so rapidly, that at this moment Joe looks upon himself as a man of property who ought not to throw himself away upon anybody; but I wish heartily that he would marry before

some little penurious ways, the outcome of his praiseworthy thrift, get too much fastened upon him. However, Joe did not like the churchyard business, for he is a little bit superstitious, and I believe that it was only the little fees and the good pay that induced him to take it in the first instance. He told the sexton that 'A' don't altogether loike warking near the winder where the *serrafum* was, for as he only saw her on the wrong side, she seemed to be always looking at him askew loike,' you remember Joe's Suffolk whine. As he generally had to do what was required in the ground at the after part of the day, and was almost always alone there, it was at last too much for him, and he wished to leave, when Dr. Grantham offered most opportunely to take him into his service at once with the same wages that he earned altogether, and there he has remained until now, always having given his kind master thorough satisfaction for his integrity and faithful discharge of his duties, which, however, were not onerous; but Joe would be all the better for a wife and two or three red-haired epitomes of himself. You must talk him over, Miss Myles. It would be sad if his

thrift should degenerate into selfish hoarding, as in our unbalanced lives it sometimes does."

The conversation then again reverted into that channel which was more in kinship with the feelings of the three, and the virtues and learning of their departed friend was so welcome a theme, and so thoroughly absorbed them that the stumbling of a heavy foot in the porch, and a correspondingly heavy knock at the hall door passed unnoticed. Visitors are not frequent at lonely parsonages in the country after nightfall, and therefore brown-eyed Phebe might be excused for breaking into their conference rather abruptly, instead of attending to the summons from without, and saying with much perturbation —

"Oh, please, sir, there's somebody a-knocking and making a dreadful noise at the front door, and I'm afraid to go a-nigh it."

"All people who have nerves feel them more or less unstrung at times like the present, and why not Phebe?" thought the Vicar.

"Indeed, Phebe; and is Jane frightened too?"

"She's almost ready to go straight off into a fit."

"This is nonsense, Phebe; making a noise, do you say, or merely knocking?"

"Oh, sir, he do make a noise, and he keep on a-coughing dreadful!"

"Oh, it's all right then. Go and open the door, Phebe. I will follow. No harm will happen to either of us from any poor fellow who has a dreadful cough."

"But it's not a true, honest cough, sir; it be put on."

"And no one who means mischief, Phebe, will herald his approach by a cough, either honest or dishonest. Go and open the door at once, lass, and show the man in," and the Vicar followed her out.

But if the sight of Joe Brunning at any time were calculated to produce a little flutter in Phebe's manners by his awkward attempts at flirtation, it was not so to-night; for Joe Brunning, who was this unwonted visitor, had not a word or a smile for her, but stood still looking almost as pale as herself, and, according to a favourite expression of his own, "quite dazed loike." He made no reply to Phebe's sharp rebuke —

"What! Joe Brunning! Was that you making all that noise? You've frightened

me and Jane almost out of our wits. Whatever did you keep on croaking for, for all the world like an old toad, and coming up to the front door, too?"

But Brunning this evening was not up to the warding off with a counterstroke, however clumsily delivered, any of Phebe's light thrusts.

"I want to see the measter," he said, in hollow tones.

"Here I am, Joe; put down that lantern and come in," said the Vicar, cheerily, and he, knowing that Phebe's propensity whenever Joe called was to hang about, either with a view to listen to Joe's voice, which, husky as it was, had dulcet charms apparently for her, or, as it was in the present instance, from a desire to gratify a curiosity, which, considering the paucity of events which came to break the routine of a somewhat monotonous and dull-toned life, was also natural, told him to follow him into the little study set aside for such receptions.

"Well, Joe," said the Vicar, after he had closed the door himself, "what is it? Why you look quite scared."

"May well be that, sir; I've—a—I've seen a speerit."

"Nothing in that if it were true, Joe, to send all the colour out of your face, my good fellow, supposing, that is, it was a spirit of a just one made perfect—for I do not accuse you of having seen an evil one," said the Vicar, smiling; "but I take the liberty of contradicting you, and saying that you've not seen either. You are a little bit upset at the loss of your good master, and so we are all, Joe."

Joe commenced shaking his head ominously, and for a few moments could give out nothing more explanatory.

"It beant that, Measter Ashcroft; it beant that."

"Sit down, Joe, for a moment; why you are actually trembling all over."

But Joe could only articulate—

"It beant that—it war the *serrafum*."

Mr. Ashcroft could not refrain from laughing.

"The 'serrafum' again, Joe. I hope that you'll not worry it out of my church window; 'tis the prettiest figure there."

"I knaw that—I knaw that," said Joe, still wagging his head solemnly; "but I b'leeve, Measter Ashcroft, she come out of t'

winder t' night, and ha' been to see the old measter."

"What!"

"I see it, sir, as sure as I see you; it war just a-coming out of the gaate. It war a'most pitch dark; I had my lantern, and I war just a-going to lock up the out-houses, and a' meet it by the gaate; a' see a loight in the doctor's room as a' come along from the cow-shed, and a' see someone moving about the room where the old measter be lying, and, b'leeve me, sir, a' could see right through it, as un sees through the *serrafum* in the winder. I felt the whole mash of my blood turn in an instant; an' then—an' then, Measter Ashcroft, just agin the gaate I see sumun coming along, and I lift up my lantern and I see—"

"What, Joe?"

"The face of the *serrafum* out of the winder looking out at me from out a hood, but I warn't a-goin' to be dashed, Measter Ashcroft," continued Joe, in a prouder and more confident tone, "so I go round by the church as I come here, and sure enough that side of the winder was pitch dark and there war no *serrafum* there."

"Of course not, Joe, the buttress takes care of that, it throws a massive shadow upon that part of the window at all times, but if all was pitch dark, as you just said, I'm at a loss how you could make anything out at all. You would be a lucky fellow, Joe, to meet one of the Seraphim; it does not come to the lot of many. But clear your brows and come with me. A very kind friend of yours is in the library with Mrs. Ashcroft. Follow me, Joe, and see the very Seraph you met this evening in the person of Miss Myles, your former mistress."

Joe did not speak; his ideas always came slowly.

"Come, Joe," said the Vicar, encouragingly; "Miss Myles will be glad to see you; she has been asking after you."

A little scuffle, as of a starched gown in retreat, was audible to the Vicar as he preceded Joe out of the door of the study.

"I have brought you your old gardener, Miss Myles. Joe Brunning has come to see you," said the Vicar as he re-entered the library, whilst Joe lagged heavily behind.

When Joe, after a few gracious words from his former mistress, had begged her to

accept his duty, and then resumed his lantern and trudged homewards somewhat lightened in heart, anyone who had met him and whose eyes could have pierced the darkness might have seen him frequently shaking his head dubiously, whilst he muttered to himself —

"'Tis wholly *stanning*.* She be more loike a *serrafum* than ever."

* A Suffolk word.

CHAPTER V.

No man can claim to usurp more than a few cubic feet of the audibilities of a public room, or to put upon the company with he loud statement of his crotchets or personalities.

* * * * * *

Haldor was not a man of many words, but short in conversation, told his opinion bluntly, and was obstinate and hard.

EMERSON.

IN the coffee-room of the Anglo-Indian Club two gentlemen had just recognized each other, and were exchanging the warm and hearty greetings that old friends give and receive at an unexpected meeting after the lapse of many years. They were both elderly men, and both wore a military aspect, but one had evidently but lately returned from a hot climate, and his deeply bronzed face showed out in strong contrast to the whiteness of his hair, his bushy eye-

brows, and his thick moustache. He was a fine and distinguished-looking man, with a very soldierly and frank demeanour, an over frank demeanour maybe, if judged by the conventional reticence of English society generally, for he spoke loudly and with the voice of one who had long been accustomed to say "Go" and to be obeyed, and his phrases were garnished or emphasized with sundry ejaculations, the most usual of which, "By Jove" or "By George," like all other invocations of the same nature, are now almost obsolete among gentlemen both in the army and navy, where were formerly their head-quarters. His laugh was also loud and frequent, and his whole appearance, notwithstanding his sixty years, the last twenty of which had been spent in active service under an Indian climate, gave tokens of robust health and fine animal spirits—a constitution, in fact, upon which no mental strain had ever long pressed—a good-hearted, jovial man, with nevertheless a visible reserve of power somewhere; a man of whose bravery and courage in the field, for instance, no one would ever think it requisite to inquire—it was stamped upon his whole person and in

every lineament with an impress that was conspicuous to each beholder. It was also very obvious that he had never been very much used to the society of women.

"Upon my word, Colonel," said his friend, still retaining his hand with a firm grip, "you bear your years well. You've not come home invalided, that's quite certain."

"By Jove, no! I'm all right—all right," answered Sir Robert Hanbury, shaking his friend's hand with ponderous energy; "no liver troubles here, eh? Complexion's first rate, isn't it—that is, what you can see of it? Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed long and heartily.

"It is really astonishing, Sir Robert. You are younger than half of our young men even now, and by-the-bye I hear you're still a gay bachelor."

"Yes, by George! without encumbrance," and again he laughed.

"Ah, well!—ah, well!—never too late, you know, Colonel! I expect that you've come home for a wife, and that now you'll settle down among us like a respectable man. Better late than never! I'll introduce you

to some nice girls, and be your best man into the bargain when you've made your choice."

"I'm not a marrying man, Mason, and I'm not going to make a fool of myself. By George! what should a man marry for at sixty!—sixty! I never had but one scratch in my life—a pretty deep one though, by Jove!—and I was close upon forty before I got that. You remember!" and the Colonel knitted his shaggy white eyebrows and tugged at his moustache.

"Yes, I remember," said his friend, slowly, and looking at the Colonel with surprise, "if you mean—"

"By Jove!" interrupted the Colonel, somewhat sternly.

"But you don't really mean to say, Sir Robert, that you have thought about that affair all these years—you!"

"Not thought about it! Why, I've not got softening of the brain! Of course I've thought about it—that is, when I've thought at all, not being much given to that kind of thing, never having any time to spare for it. But I tell you what it is, Mason. You know what a lot of man-hunters come out to India

after us poor fellows. Well, by Jove! that girl's face always came up before me, and was like a shield of protection. Ha! ha! Whenever a woman, maid or widow, made eyes at me I couldn't help taking stock—making an inventory—during the process, and the result always was—'*You*, after Mary Myles—ugh!'"

"'Pon my word, Colonel, you've not a smaller opinion of your own personal merits as regards the fair sex than you had twenty years ago!"

Sir Robert's clenched fist came down heavily upon the table and made the crockery ring again, and a gentleman who was reading at a table on the far side of the room suddenly started forward in his seat, and gave a searching glance at the Colonel, when, sinking back again in his chair, he resumed his former attitude, shading his face with the paper he was reading.

"No," growled the Colonel, "I've not forgotten it—never shall forget it. A girl without a brass farthing, of no social standing, to look me calmly in the face and refuse me!" and at the absurdity of the idea Sir Robert again laughed out heartily.

"Bad taste, wasn't it, Colonel?" said Sir Henry Mason, smiling.

"By Jove!" shouted the Colonel; "I thought at the time that the girl was clearly out of her wits—beside herself."

Sir Henry leant forward and whispered to his friend that they were not alone, as a hint for the Colonel to moderate the tones of his voice. The Colonel gave a hasty and indifferent glance at the stranger before mentioned, who continued reading, and went on without heeding.

"I'm bound to say that no bomb or shell ever startled me more. I never even took the trouble to examine the outposts before making the assault, nor took any time to consider whether the result would be worth the sacrifice involved, for, look you, I had no doubt of victory, and then—then, as if I had only been a pale, pettifogging lawyer's clerk with a hundred and fifty pounds a year, she said quietly, without any fluster, and in the sweetest of sweet voices, 'No! no! no!' By Jove, though, what a lovely creature she was!"

"You had that consolation, Colonel, anyhow—she was worthy of your admiration."

"I never saw her equal before or since," said the Colonel, moodily. "But what became of her? Married a curate, I suppose, and had ten children, and is now a mere rag of her former self, so to speak."

"No, you are mistaken. She is still unmarried—at least, so I heard when I was down in the North last year. I met a fellow there who knew her when she was at Girton, —in fact, he also had had a scratch, as you term it."

"Girton! Girton! Why, that's the place where they manufacture blue stockings, isn't it?"

"You are a little bit old-fashioned, Hanbury. That epithet is out of date nowadays, but as you have brought up the lady's name I may as well avow that she is what you would call a blue stocking."

"Mary Myles a blue!" shouted the Colonel, in consternation.

Sir Henry Mason smiled.

"Mary Myles a blue!" repeated the Colonel, in a low voice. "Why, Mason, the first time I saw her she was in a swing in a white frock and blue sash—a mere wisp of a girl, not much over sixteen. I think I see

her now—her brown hair blowing in the wind, and one of her little shoes had fallen off. By Jove! hers were the prettiest feet I ever saw in my life! It was those little feet crossed over each other, and one shoeless, that made a fool of me there and then.

"'Colonel Hanbury, miss,' said the damsel who had opened the gate. Did she jump off in a hurry at being thus surprised? Not a bit of it.

"'Colonel Hanbury, please pick up my shoe,' she cried, smiling all the time as if there was nothing unusual in the request; 'pick up my shoe,' and I picked it up directly.

"For a moment I half meditated putting it into my pocket, but she was holding out her pretty hand with its pink palm; and whilst I was looking at that, she whisked it out of my hand with the most provoking and childlike simplicity, and slipping it on, jumped down and said in the sweetest of voices —

"'Now I can shake hands, and say good-morning, Colonel Hanbury. My mother is within; I will announce you,' and I followed her as meekly as a lamb."

"Well?" said Mason, smiling.

"Mrs. Myles was a delightful person; her

husband had been an early chum of mine. I had looked forward to meeting her, but when that girl left the room—and I verily believe she returned to her swing—I found no words to say to my old friend's widow. For three whole days and nights that girl was ever before me. I don't believe I slept one wink."

"Well?"

"Well; why on the fourth day I was at that garden gate again, I had a belief, see you, that the swing was her morning occupation, and the idea of proposing to a girl in a swing rather tickled my fancy."

"Proposing to a girl of only sixteen whom you'd only seen once before!"

"Why not? I'd nothing to wait for, had I? I'd got to years of discretion, eh?"

"Well, and was she in the swing?"

"No, but she must have seen me unlatch the gate, for I had hardly entered the garden before I saw her coming towards me with a basket on each arm, a broad straw hat shading her face, a blue cotton gown, and a white apron and bib."

"'I am so glad that you have come, Colonel Hanbury,' she cried, offering me her gloved right hand from under the basket handle;

"I am going to gather cherries, and you can hold the baskets for me as I throw them in. My mother is just this moment busy with some household matters, so if in the interim you will come and help me I shall be so very much obliged to you; and by the time we have finished my mother will be able to receive you,' and quite demurely and as a matter of course she handed me both the baskets.

"'Thank you very much, Colonel Hanbury. It is very kind of you. Follow me, please. You must stoop your head,' she said, laughing, as she held back a bough that hung low over a side path. She looked so charming as she did so that as I ducked under the green leaves, and saw her rosy smiling mouth within a foot of me, I felt a strong desire—But she had shackled me with a basket on each arm.

"'These baskets are tolerably heavy, too heavy for you, Miss Myles, to have carried even empty; you surely did not contemplate carrying them back when full?'

"'Oh yes, Colonel Hanbury, one at a time. I am very strong, but you will be able to carry them both at one time, will you not?'

"We were now at the cherry tree. A light ladder was fastened firmly to one of the

branches. She skipped up it before I was aware of her intentions. The tree was laden with its beautiful fruit, which hung in ruddy bunches more plentiful than the leaves.

"'Now please, Colonel Hanbury, just put one basket on the ground out of your hand, and hold the other with both hands. You see I should have been obliged to hang it on a bough if you had not so kindly come to help me.'

"She then took off her hat and threw it down. I stood below like a gawky schoolboy, holding a basket while she plucked the cherries and tossed them into it. I kept my eyes upon her, and not upon the basket.

"'Why, Colonel,' she cried, 'you're not looking! The basket's full and they are all falling upon the ground! Put that down, please; and now for the other. But perhaps you'll be kind enough to gather up those that are fallen while I rest my arms a little,' and she sat herself down on the top rung.

"Now, just fancy me grovelling upon the ground picking up those cherries! I suppose I got red in the face, because presently she said in a sweet and almost compassionate voice —

"'But you look very, very hot, Colonel Hanbury. Will you not like to rest a little too?'

"'Oh, no, no.'

"I wanted her down from that ladder, you see, Mason, out of that confounded cherry tree. Every moment I was getting more madly in love with her, and I wanted to tell her so.

"At last both baskets were full.

"'Oh, thank you so much, Colonel. Now, please, take them both up, and carry them on towards the house. I shall soon overtake you.'

"'Can I be of no assistance?' I said, holding out both my hands, but she had perched herself on the top rung and had crossed her little feet on another lower down. I saw the blue bows on her shoes peeping out from beneath her skirts.

"'Oh, no; thank you very much, Colonel Hanbury.'

"I saw she was resolute, so that chance was gone. I took up my baskets, one in each hand. I had to hold my arms straight down, of course—a more helpless, stupid position for a man of my height and size can

hardly be imagined. You may well laugh, Mason.

"As I turned my back and was moving over I heard her spring lightly to the ground. She was putting on her hat when she joined me again.

"'I can hardly thank you enough, Colonel Hanbury,' she said, 'for thus pressing you into my service; but you see we have no regular gardener, and we keep no boy.'

Sir Henry Mason laughed outright.

"'Colonel Hanbury,' she said after a while, as I had said nothing, 'do you like cherry pie? If you do, and will stay dinner—we dine at two, but you can make it your luncheon, you know—you can taste the cherries you have helped to gather, and I am going to make the pie.'

"'It delights me, Miss Myles, to hear you say "pie." I always hear them called "tarts," and I hate the word; "tarts," as I understood them in my schoolboy days, were uncovered little kickshaws.'

"'My dear mother, Colonel Hanbury, likes old-fashioned words, and she has brought me up in old-fashioned ways also, so I make all the pies, puddings, and cakes.'

"'For your sake, then, Miss Myles, I will submit to a possible attack of dyspepsia, and never refuse pie, pudding, or cake when I take luncheon here.'

"She lifted her clear grey eyes to my face.

"'If I thought dyspepsia would be the result, Colonel Hanbury, you should not be offered anything of the kind when you are so good as to come to see my mother; and I hope you'll come often—but my pastry never causes dyspepsia. Will you sit down and rest, Colonel Hanbury? I will go and find my mother.'

"She motioned me to a garden chair, but I did not sit down.

"I know you think me a fool, Mason, in telling you all this, and I can't tell how it is that I remember it all so well, considering the life I've led since."

"I think such events in our lives are always remembered," answered Sir Henry, sententiously.

"'By Jove!' I thought, 'here's an opportunity!' You see, I'd quite made up my mind to take the plunge, and I wasn't going to hang about dawdling week after week, so I

straightway made use of my opportunity. Standing before her I put out my right hand and took hers.

"'You are not going, Colonel Hanbury? You'll stay and taste my cherry pie?'

"'I hope so,' I said, and held her hand. 'I am a soldier, you see, my dear young lady, and am rather blunt, and not used to pay—to pay compliments. I prefer to speak to you before I see your mother. The upshot of this little preamble is that I love you.'

"She looked me at once in the face with wide open eyes, without a blush, in the most unblushing manner," said the Colonel, laughing at his attempt at a joke, "and she made no reply, so in rather plain fashion I blurted out —

"'I ask you to be my wife.' I suppose I ought to have trembled a bit, but I'd never trembled in my life before an enemy, so I wasn't going to stammer before a young girl when I was offering her a position she could never have dreamed of, but she looked at me with as proud a look as if it had been my groom and not I who was proposing to her. Like a fool I took pity on her youth and

ignorance, and repeated the question. She had allowed me to retain her hand all this time, mind you, so to push on the siege more vigorously I pressed the little soft hand as I repeated: 'I ask you to be my wife, my dear girl; it doesn't take much consideration to say Yes, does it?'"

"Well?"

"Well, she hastily withdrew her hand from mine, and looked at me steadfastly with those eyes of hers, as I just now told you, and answered very slowly —

"'But the answer, Colonel Hanbury, if you are really serious, which I can hardly imagine, is No!'"

"And so ended your romance."

"Well, I did just think that the girl might have some sneaking kindness for some young fellow which was blocking the way, and that when all the advantages were put before her she would doubtless reconsider her verdict—not that I had any desire to play Number Two, supposing that might have been the case; although I was forty-two or thereabouts, and she just sixteen. Nevertheless, after making my bow to the damsel I did go straight to the mother and

told her my dilemma, asking her if there was any prior attachment, and she fired up just as if the question implied an insult, and gave me such a look.

"'My dear child, Colonel Hanbury, has but just entered her seventeenth year.'

"'Well, my good lady,' I answered, 'if it has not been in your experience, it has certainly come under mine as a fact that girls and boys often have their little love affairs without the knowledge of papa and mamma.'

"I had put my foot in it.

"'Mary is not one of those girls,' she said, haughtily; then, regarding my penitent demeanour, added: 'I would gladly have seen her the wife of a good and brave man, and I am sorry for you, but her "No" means no!'

"The next day I was on my way to India, and after twenty years I come back to find her—not married to a curate, but worse—an old maid and a blue—a blue! What a narrow escape I had!"

"Not a very narrow one, eh, Hanbury?"

Sir Robert Hanbury made no reply to this covert hint of his friend, nor saw the half smile which accompanied it. He was moodily

regarding the tablecloth. After a few minutes in this apparently absorbing occupation, he looked up, and, regarding General Mason with a determined air, said, in low and measured tones —

"I tell you what it is, Mason, I was a fool—a confounded fool—in not stopping for luncheon. I ought to have known better. I behaved myself like a miserable sub. There was not a bit of generalship in anything I did. Oughtn't I to have known what a mere drummer boy ought to be whipped for not knowing, that any commander who brings all his forces against the enemy without first attacking and securing the outposts is a fool for his pains and deserves to be well thrashed? If I had stayed luncheon, and taken some of her cherry pie and praised it, and asked for a second helping, and, in defiance of a frightful indigestion for a month, had a third helping, by Jove! I believe that that girl would now have been Lady Hanbury!"

"Forgive me for smiling, Hanbury, but your cherry pie episode recalls a well-known distich scratched on the pane of a country inn —

"In memory of the cherry pey
That cost half-a-guiney."

But Colonel Hanbury was in no mood to laugh at another man's jest, if jest were intended.

Sir Henry Mason, however, seemed mischievously bent upon playing upon his friend's idiosyncrasy of self-approbation, so remarked with a twinkle of his eye —

"But she's not done so badly after all, excepting, of course, that she's not Lady Hanbury. I heard last year when I was down in the north that she had gained the highest honours—was a classical tripos, man."

"A classical tripos! a classical tripos! Merciful heavens!"

"And is now head-mistress of the Chippenham College for Girls, with a salary of five hundred a year; not so bad for your penniless little girl, eh, Colonel?"

The Colonel sprang from his chair.

"Worse and worse," he roared. "Mary Myles a school-mistress! By Jove, it serves her right!"

The stranger laid down his newspaper and crossed the room on his way to the

door. As he passed he bowed slightly to Colonel Hanbury, who returned the salutation.

"Do you know that gentleman?" observed Sir Henry.

"He was one of the passengers in the *Guatemala*. I believe that he is a Judge of some eminence in Bombay, but somehow we didn't get on together during the voyage. I rather think our politics did not coincide. I did not recognize him until he bowed, and I cannot recall his name at this moment."

Sir Robert walked to the window.

"Mary Myles a school-mistress!" he muttered. "Mary Myles a blue!"

CHAPTER VI.

O love, my love! If I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

ROSSETTI.

WHEN in the lives of men and women the dial of time scores a flight of ten years, the index points to moral or physical changes as obvious as the sun's record on the dial-plate; but in the life of a woodland tree ten years leave hardly a mark of their passage. There is no appreciable advance towards decay and dissolution. The child may frolic and dance over its roots, and again as an old man, with trembling hands resting on his staff, he may stay awhile his weary feet beneath its shade;

whilst the tree itself is still in its glorious prime. Thousands upon thousands of short-lived creatures each fleeting summer have made merry in its branches; song and gladness have re-echoed there for many decades, and the tiny players of pipe and tabor have mouldered generation after generation in the deep leafy mould beneath. Birth-place and hunting ground of myriads of enemies, who are slowly but surely working its destruction, scooping out its very bowels to make them bridal couches and nursing cradles, it is yet an object of grandeur and beauty, all unwitting that its very life-blood is being sapped by tribes of little despised borers, tunnelling its mighty stem in every direction.

The chestnuts of Sunnyside glade, save that their arms stretched yet a little further towards the woodland path, were unchanged. Chestnuts are not as sturdy as the oak, to whom age is a crown of glory. The years piled on years bring them decrepitude and palsied limb, but on the other hand the ravages of small enemies are fewer, and they succumb to time, not before the armies of insect invaders.

The chestnuts of Sunnyside glade had

passed unscathed through the past ten years which had stripped off many a noble arm from their not far distant neighbours by the joint attacks of lightning and storms, without its being apparent why they had been so mercifully passed by, when the tempest and whirlwind rushed in blind fury over the land and had laid so many others low.

Beneath a dull November sky, their golden leaves yet remaining, loosened by last night's hoar frost, were fluttering down in showers. Their rustle as they fell was the only sound that met the ears of a solitary figure, who stood long rooted to the spot immovable—chained, as it seemed, by some enthralling memories.

A tall, powerful, bearded and sunburnt man was this visitor to a seldom trodden spot. A grave man, over whose temples the hair, elsewhere so thick, had somewhat fallen away, which added still more to the noble breadth of brow. That brow was marked a little prematurely when viewed in contrast with the other features; they looked like lines of thought rather than of years, and the deep cut between the eyebrows spoke of a long habit of knitting them, the result

often of suppressed feelings of indignation, but always indicative of gnawing cares—a stern face on the whole, with firm, well closed lips. His age might have been guessed to be between thirty-five and forty, but a second glance would possibly qualify the first impression of the beholder, and give rise to the added remark —

"It is possible that he looks much older than he is."

He was bareheaded, holding his hat in his hand, although the wind that with no gentle hand lifted his hair was sharp and searching, and the thick double piled overcoat that he was wearing showed that he was not indifferent to cold.

It was no soft emotion that overpowered him, although his eyes scanned the stem of the larger tree on the mound with the eagerness of a lover searching for a mistress's cherished name; and if those were really tears with which his eyes glistened, they were tears which made the line between his brows to deepen, and his lips to close yet firmer.

"God forgive me," he said, after awhile. "I ought not to have come here first," and

covering his head he turned away s uddenly in the direction of Sunnyside.

Mrs. Hazelhurst had received a telegram on the previous morning announcing her nephew's arrival in England, followed by a brief note which signified that it was his intention to call upon her on the following day. He had not written to her throughout all this interval of ten years, until his reply to her letter upon his mother's death, which response was singularly brief, considering the occasion. She had felt wounded by his seeming neglect. At first she had hardly expected it, but when that fleeting futile love-dream of his had vanished into thin air, she had hoped that occasionally he would have written, or showed in some other way that his old affection to the ever-kind aunt of his boyhood, and to his early little playmate, was again reasserting itself.

From time to time, as she listened to her sister's glowing description of his rapidly advancing career, and his brilliant prospects in the future, her thoughts had again inclined to the possibility of the alliance cherished of old, and in this she was encouraged by Mrs.

Langridge. Helen had refused several offers —she seemed resolutely set against marriage. What other reason could be assigned for this, but that she secretly and tenaciously clung to the girlish remembrance of her handsome cousin? India somehow did not now seem too far off for her child. He would retire early—that intention he openly avowed to his mother—he would eventually take up his residence in England. Such a future as was held out to her would compensate for parting with her daughter for a year or two, and so the thought thus entertained grew and grew, until it occupied her mind almost as fully as formerly.

What a devoted son he was! His letters to his mother were curt, certainly, but then he was overwhelmed with serious employments. That he worked terrificly hard to attain all that he achieved was self-evident. A position so unwonted at so early an age was not acquired without personal cost and sacrifice, but Mrs. Langridge was satisfied. Almost every mail brought her some token of his loving care for her—some choice Eastern gift, increasing in costliness as the years brought him increasing wealth. What shawls,

and rugs, and embroideries, and carved work found their way to her home! Not one doit would he ever receive to diminish her income since the hour he found himself dependent upon her, or since that "silly affair," as his mother put it, which, after all, had not turned out so badly; as he was evidently bent upon convincing his mother that he was not the weak fool that she had thought him to be. Everything showed to Mrs. Langridge that the films had fallen from his eyes, and that each earnest endeavour of his life was to coincide with her every wish. Yes, it had been a good thing, a providential thing after all. India could give him more than England. Here he must have waited a lifetime for one quarter of the results that had now accrued to him from the service of a few years. In England how he must have toiled before he could have got a name! Now he had both wealth and honours.

There was as yet, no hint from him of any intention of marrying, but his mother had no desire that he should ally himself with any Anglo-Indian girl. She had once ventured to write: "When you pay your promised visit to England, dear boy, I suppose that

you will not go back again without a wife." And he had written in reply: "I do not see my way clear to go to England so soon as I expected. When the announcement for which I am waiting comes, I shall go, but not before; but if it does not come before, expect me, at any rate, in the tenth year. Then I shall possibly stay a whole year in England, and assuredly I shall not return hither without my wife."

This letter, a longer one than usual, Mrs. Langridge sent to her sister. "Glorious old fellow," she wrote, "he is doing exactly what I would have him to do. I am told that a baronetcy will probably be offered to him on his retirement, so I am in no hurry; and our dear Helen will not harm by this delay." And Mrs. Langridge, with her increased means, was equal to the occasion, and received and paid visits in a style befitting the mother of a judge and a possible baronet.

But she, the mother, had died suddenly a few days before this tenth year had dawned.

With sad thoughts, as she revolved all these things in her mind, Mrs. Hazelhurst looked forth from the same library windows

from which she had seen the handsome youth with clouded brow drive off just over ten years since, and — The gate swung back. Was that bearded, bronzed, hard-visaged man who lifted his hat in recognition the object of her thoughts? Could he be Herbert Langridge? A strange feeling of disappointment, almost of repulsion, crept over her. How different was this coming home to all she had pictured! Was this man her Indian Prince?

Whilst still these feelings were predominant he had entered the library rather abruptly, and not waiting to be announced. A silent embrace was his greeting.

"You hardly know me," he said, after a pause. "I see it in your face, my dear aunt; but really I am no counterfeit, I am still Herbert Langridge—by name, anyhow."

"And by nature, too, I expect," said his aunt, graciously, recovering herself and faintly smiling. "Welcome—welcome home! Ah! how sad it is," she said, sighing audibly, "that your dear mother no longer lives to welcome you; to think that the meeting to which she ever looked forward was never to be!'

Mr. Langridge had taken a seat. He shaded his face at those last words, leaning his elbow upon a table near.

"But my mother was suddenly taken hence," he said, huskily; "her death-bed was not clouded with those regrets."

"That is true; but it does not make the loss any more endurable for those who are left. Rather the contrary. So many hopes —so many visions of a future, that never was destined to come—haunt me still. Poor Elinor!"

"But was not my mother happy? It was my constant endeavour that every wish of her heart should be gratified."

"And you can take that for your consolation Herbert I never knew before how much my sister's heart was set upon such things; but latterly she looked ten years younger, and at her receptions was as attractive as the youngest beauties present."

Mr. Langridge made no answer.

"You have come without any luggage. I presume you left it at the station, Herbert?"

"I have only come to-day for a call, aunt."

"For a call! after all these years! But,

of course, only a preliminary one to a very long visit. You remain in England a year, I believe?"

"Not now, aunt; no, my visit will not exceed two months. Things here, you see, are altered for me; and now with the view I still hold of retiring in four or five years, I hardly care to take too long a holiday; but dear Helen, she is not married I hear. How is that, aunt?"

An awkward question, as Mrs. Hazelhurst took it, but she evaded it.

"Helen is difficult; she has had splendid opportunities, but I am not sorry to have her still all my own. She is out riding just now, but you will see her at luncheon; but now, as you have touched upon matrimony, I suppose that I am not far wrong if I venture to hazard a remark upon yourself. Do you take a wife back with you?"

"That was the main object of my visit to England," he said, dryly.

Mrs. Hazelhurst smiled inwardly.

"His heart is set upon my Helen," she thought; "but how blunt he is. I am not sure that she will see you with the same eyes as formerly;" but she said aloud, "You have

allowed yourself but a short time to make your choice. Two months!"

"My choice was made ten years since."

Mrs. Hazelhurst pushed back her chair. The grating words—the cold, hard voice—the stern face turned towards her took away all power of reply.

"Therefore have I come," he continued, in the same dry tone, "and therefore do I seek you now as a petitioner having a favour to ask; but, aunt, you look frightened. Is my aspect so grim as all that?"

"I hardly understand you, Herbert," faltered his aunt.

"Well, then, to be explicit, I have come to England to claim the hand of the woman I loved in my boyhood; but don't be alarmed, aunt, I am not mad."

"Your voice sounds cruelly harsh, Herbert. Am I really to infer that you are actually alluding to Miss Myles? If so, such an idea does almost seem to me like madness. What would your poor mother say were she alive? Miss Myles is now a middle-aged woman—faded, precise, and care-worn!"

"And what am I? Look at me! You see me brow-lined and furrowed from hast-

ing to be rich! And what else is there within that you do not, cannot see? A heart prematurely hardened from this pursuit of wealth and honours, a life from which all poetry has been reft—crushed—cruelly crushed out. And my mother never relented—not one word ever came from her of sympathy or pity! Look at me—in the lower sense—a success; in my higher nature—a wreck; a Will machine with all the cogs and wheels moving in admirable adjustment; but a machine, after all, without a soul!"

"Good heaven! Herbert, that unfortunate attachment seems to have blotted out all natural affection. It is horrible!"

"My mother, in her pride, asked for success—she spurned love away from her. Year after year I toiled day and night, I forestalled her every desire. I toiled, I say, day and night in the darkness of grief, obeying her implacable commands to the very letter. I waited, and waited in vain for the message which never came. I heard it sometimes in the watches of the night: 'Come home, my son, and marry the woman you love;' but it never came. That noble woman had bound me to this blind obedience. 'Your

mother is a woman,' she said, 'she will surely be touched by your filial love and devotion. Wait! and if in the course of years your constant service wins not a spontaneous acknowledgment, you can then go to her with a clear soul and ask your release. You can then say, "Mother, I have done all this for you; have you nothing for me in return?"' And this is the tenth year, and I am here, but my mother said not one word, and she is in her grave."

"Your mother was under a wrong impression, Herbert. She thought that you had overcome that—that early predilection, but now, even now reconsider it. Miss Myles, I have only seen her once, but that was lately at poor Dr. Grantham's funeral, and although she was at some distance and veiled, I could see by her general bearing that she was much aged, and who could expect otherwise in ten years?—ten years make their mark in any woman—and when one has to earn a livelihood by teaching the natural result must be that such a woman would change more than another. If she were not the wife for you, my dear Herbert, ten years ago, depend upon it she is less suitable now than she was then."

"Look you, aunt," said her nephew, springing to his feet. "I knew not whether she were alive or dead until two days since, when I accidentally overheard her name alluded to by some old friend of her father's, a fellow traveller, addicted to loud talking. Had she been dead, mind you—had I come home to find two graves instead of one—think not that I would have buried the love of my youth in her grave, and left it there for the grass to grow over, and my heart to blossom into another new, fresh flower of love. No! I would have sought her grave, but I would not have left her there and turned my footsteps back into the world to seek forgetfulness and oblivion. I would have borne those dear remains back with me, back to India, far away from this cold island, and its colder people, and there in India, in old heathenish fashion, I would have builded a splendid mausoleum, and waited again, waited for ten years—twenty years—for I am strong, and sorrow does not kill me, as you see. I am as obstinate in my body as my soul; what I will, I do. Yes! I would have waited till I could sleep with her the sleep of death; but she lives, thank

God, she lives! and you tell me in order to change my purpose which has also lived these ten years that she is 'faded! care-worn! precise!' Be she 'faded' she is my own. Every line that I shall number on that dear face, each, each one will show to me the record of how they came, and through what they have come."

"He is raving, he is stark mad," thought Mrs. Hazelhurst, but she merely observed coldly, "The simplest solution would be her six-and-thirty years. You are unjust," she continued after a pause, "unjust and unfeeling, when you thus covertly allude to my sister, your mother. She was apparently mistaken, she judged you as any reasoning being would have judged you from your acts. Being away, she—all of us—had no other means of judging, and she, and all of us, thought that you were endeavouring to show her that you wished to atone for—well, in short, that you heartily repented of your folly."

"What, aunt? did my mother who knew me as I was then, better than anyone else, did she think of me so meanly after all? Was she proud of me only because I worked

to gain, strove for an object, and knew of me nothing beyond? Could she imagine that in the higher affections I was really possessed of such a poverty of soul that I could win a woman's love with ardent words and worship, laying down my life almost at her feet if she had asked but for it, and then shift off and fling it away, as a newly-donned garment, no longer required, is cast aside when the sun comes out and warms a cold spring day? My mother thought that? my mother! Yet if she did think me so miserable a wretch as your words imply, she was more guiltless than I thought. She was not then indifferent and heartless. She knew not that I suffered. Is this, can this be true?"

"She had no misgivings of any sort, none; of that, Herbert, rest well assured. Believe me, knowing your mother as I knew her, it is with no small anguish of heart that I thus plead my sister's—my sister's cause with her own son, but it is true. Two years ago, alluding to that event now so painfully brought before me again, she said to me, 'How thankful Herbert must be that I withstood his boyish caprice. Every action shows it,

dear fellow! He is of too noble a nature to speak of it in direct terms, as he could hardly do so without some disparaging remarks upon the lady who was the cause of it; but the facts speak for themselves.'"

Herbert covered his face with his hands and wept.

"My poor mother! my poor mother! These are the first tears that I have shed since I left England. I wept not when the news of my mother's death was brought me, though my eyes were like balls of fire; but no tears came to moisten them. O, God! I thank Thee that I can weep again. My poor mother! you cast away from you the true riches of the heart, and losing a son and a daughter were satisfied with the counterfeit coin of the world —paltry gewgaws of wealth and pomp; poor, poor mother!"

"Restrain yourself, Herbert; you are not talking as a reasonable man should talk, much less as a wise man who is proud of his steadfast will. I cannot listen any longer if you indulge in these wild tirades, and persist in reflections upon my sister."

"Aunt, forgive me. For ten years I have

been but a dry stick. This outburst is welcome; it shows me that the sap of true vitality is not altogether extinct. I am thankful that I can weep."

"What is the favour which you spoke of but now?" she said, anxious to divert the conversation into a different channel.

"Simply this. That my marriage may take place from your house, and that you will kindly ask my intended bride to take up her residence here until all my arrangements are completed."

"That can hardly be, Herbert. Upon reflection you will think you have done wrong in making such a request."

"I have well considered it, aunt; it is no sudden thought. My sole idea is to honour her, and from this house, where she bore humiliation so nobly, I desire that she shall go forth as my bride. You cannot deny me. Is it so unreasonable a request? If Helen were here I would ask her if she would not be glad to do honour to a lady to whom she owes so much."

"Luncheon is about to be served, Herbert; we will talk it over by-and-bye."

"I have no time to adjourn it. I take the afternoon train to London, and by the first express to-morrow morning I journey to the north. After arranging the preliminaries of my marriage I have to settle my mother's affairs, and I have other matters to attend to in connection with my appointment in India, so you see I have not much time to lose."

Helen, entering at this juncture, met her cousin with frank warmth; but her surprise was equal to her mother's.

"How dreadfully he is altered," she said to herself over and over again; but when after luncheon her mother drew her into another room and hastily told her all the circumstances of the interview and her nephew's request, adding, parenthetically, "He must be mad," overcome by sympathetic pity, she murmured —

"Poor fellow, poor dear Polly. Oh, mother! darling mother! do let us have the wedding here," and sobbed aloud on her mother's shoulder.

A few minutes after both women re-entered the library with tearful eyes. Going up to Herbert Langridge, they each laid a hand on either arm.

" This dear girl has prevailed. Bring your intended bride here, and, since you will have it so, may God bless you both," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, and laid her right hand upon her nephew's head.

CHAPTER VII.

And ever as their shadows threw
Themselves athwart the crimson pane,
White arms the casement backward drew
And stretched toward the swelling main.
"The day is done, the night is nigh,
The boats are hasting to the lee.
On what far shore becalmed doth lie
That bark should bear my love to me."

A COLD, drizzling rain was falling when Herbert Langridge arrived at the great manufacturing city of the north. "Drive me to the best and nearest hotel," he had said; but the best did not happen to be the nearest, and, for reasons of his own, as the traveller was evidently a stranger, the cabman who received this command responded to it by taking him to a second-rate commercial inn, the altogether jaded look of his fare suggesting to the driver a hard-worked bagman rather than

an Indian judge. In too impatient a mood to order him to drive elsewhere, and possessed with that spirit of irritation which almost welcomes a condition of things that justifies it, Herbert flung himself from the vehicle whilst objurgating the stupidity of the driver, whom he nevertheless gladdened by more than double the pay due to him, and, entering, ordered private rooms.

Private rooms, however, were scarce at "The Merry Bells," and although fires of the largest dimensions were blazing away in the coffee and public rooms, there was none in the dingy little apartment into which he was shown.

"Let me have a fire quickly, and anything for dinner that you have in the house, only quickly," he said, shuddering. "Have you no bedroom with a fire in it, where I can refresh myself with some soap and warm water?"

"I am afraid, sir, that all the best bedrooms are full. But I'll soon make a fire in the room next to this. But do you want a fire in both rooms at once?"

"Yes, make as large a fire as you can in both rooms, and soon. Be quick, be

quick, my good girl; don't you see I'm perished?"

The ready application of a coin not often offered to her occasioned first a stare of surprise, and secondly gave rise to a conscientious scruple, which surmised that another coin of similar dimensions but of a paler colour might have been intended.

"Do you know what you've given me, please, sir?" she said, holding it out displayed on her not too clean palm.

"Yes, yes; do make haste."

Oh the power of a tiny bit of gold! Wood and coals in a few moments were flaming and roaring up the wide old-fashioned chimney whence a few moments before the down draught brought into the room the commingled odours of soot and damp. Without removing either travelling or great coat, Herbert drew a chair close to the fire, and, heedless of scorching, thrust his booted feet up to the very bars. "To-morrow, then, I shall see her," he murmured. It hardly seemed possible that he and she were to meet on the morrow, and nothing in the expression of his face showed therein the anticipation of a great joy. "Poor thing! careworn and

faded," he muttered, and the line between his brows deepened. "Well 'tis no great matter to me now," and he thrust back with his heel a blazing faggot of pine which was about to precipitate itself into the room. "But 'precise old maid!' there's the sting. Can it be possible that she has narrowed down into a thing of formalities—a walking Greek grammar?" he groaned aloud. "It's possible; we are never stationary—ever moving onwards, either on the upward path still broadening the higher it goes, or dwindling like the unused functions of some of the lower animals, or fossilizing as I have been. Poor Mary! why should I ask more from her than I find in myself? It has been a long, long mistake, and it was a miserable weakness in me to have yielded as I did before that claptrap word—duty! duty! duty! Enforced duties are wretched failures always. If I had taken my own freehanded course it might have been all well now; I could have braved anger, cursing, or poverty, and defied the whole army of malicious and inimical influences, had she, as I knew her and adored her, ten years since, been by my side. But now 'careworn and faded!' yes, no doubt 'a woman working for

her livelihood naturally gets careworn and faded in ten years.'" He started from the chair and paced the room.

This, once the great bugbear of the majority of gentlemen, and still lingering in the breasts of many, namely, the unfitness and the unloveliness of gentle womanhood earning its own livelihood, had always been intensely felt by Herbert Langridge when younger, and before he left England. It resulted from the brave and warm generosity of his character, and from the high estimation in which he held women, and from no meaner motive. Ten years since there was a momentary recoil when his newly-found goddess, his hamadryad faded away into simple Mary Myles, the governess, and his residence in India had served to strengthen those opinions. It is true that after the first shock which had reduced his sylvan divinity to a young woman who was his cousin's instructress had subsided, there had been a new fascination in the, to him, unwonted alliance of feminine loveliness and grace with learning; but now that was gone which had made her for him, so noble a personification of all that was beautiful and charming.

"'Tis no matter now," he repeated, with bitterness; "both our lives are spoiled, so we'll mourn together over the embers of the past."

Dinner being announced as ready and awaiting him, he returned to the sitting-room which he had left in order to re-arrange his apparel; but although no fault could be found in the preparation of that which was placed before him, he ate but little. Disquieting thoughts and unavailing regrets are poor appetizers.

A sound as of an organ or harmonium came indistinctly through the closed curtains.

"Whence comes that dismal noise?" he asked, testily, of the young woman who was promptly responding to the previous order of "Clear these things away."

"Dismal, sir! Don't you like music? Why, we think a deal here of the Marygold Guild, and it's their night for practice."

"And, pray, my good girl, what is this Marygold Guild that is thought so much of?"

"The Guild of St. Mary's. They're the work girls from the great factory, and they're getting up their Christmas oratorio, and they wear a marygold for their badge."

Two words had fallen upon the ears of Herbert Langridge, "Mary" and "marygolds," and gentler memories touched him.

"It is a long while until bedtime," he thought. "Where, then, is this Guild, my girl? It must be somewhere near at hand, I suppose, for the sounds of the instrument to be heard thus?"

"It is only two or three minutes off, sir."

"I suppose anyone can go in by paying?"

"Oh, no, sir, no one; leastways, no gentleman, and this is especially a close night. But you can hear them quite well in the porch, and the Lady President is worth listening to, I can tell you."

A sharp bell summoned the damsel away as Herbert was about to ask a further question.

"'Tis just yonder, sir—the hall I mean—if you've a mind to walk over," and she jerked her hand in the direction as she hastily left the room.

"No, sir," said the doorkeeper, as Herbert tendered him a coin, "this is not a public night at the Institute. It is given up one evening in the week to the Guild of St.

Mary's, and this is their night. The Lady Foundress is there to-night, and I have strict orders to keep the doors locked. Those are the Rector of St. Mary's orders, who is here. The girls sing very well. They are now on *Elijah.* You can hear them very well here, sir."

Herbert Langridge gave a careless glance through the inner glass doors. There was a group of some thirty to forty girls at the far end, and a female figure, half concealed by a curtain, was seated at the organ, by whose side stood a gentleman in the garb of a clergyman. There was nothing to interest him in this, so Herbert was about to turn impatiently away when three clear voices broke forth in the sweet song of the angels to the sleeping Elijah, and at once arrested his departing footsteps. The girls of Yorkshire and Lancashire have good voices generally, and possess the musical instinct. The purity of their intonation and the quality of their vocal organs in their rendering of that delicious strain of melody immediately exercised a subtle charm upon him. He drew close to the glass again and listened intently. He hardly heard the final bars, for

his worn spirit, like that of the tired prophet, seemed borne away into contact with the Invisible.

"I think, sir," whispered the doorkeeper, "that the Lady President is going to sing now. I see the Rector speaking to her. You must stop to hear her."

Again Herbert leant towards the panes. A firm but delicate touch played the opening bars.

"Ah!" he cried aloud, startled out of himself, "my favourite air, 'O rest in the Lord.'" He involuntarily raised his hand as if to enjoin silence upon the man at his elbow, as a voice of rare mellowness swelled through the hushed air as it sung with equal sweetness and power that divine song. Touched by some secret sympathetic awe, his heart throbbed violently. "Who is that lady?" he asked the doorkeeper, hastily.

"The President and Foundress of St. Mary's Guild," answered the man. "But please stand on one side, sir; I must unlock the door, they are coming out."

A tall, graceful figure was being carefully cloaked by the Rector, who assiduously drew the fur-lined hood closely around her face.

As they passed through the door, she leaning on his arm, the Rector addressed some words to her in a low tone which obliged her to turn her head towards him. Her trailing skirts brushed Herbert as she went by, and an indefinable thrill ran through him. With somewhat more of spiritualized feelings than had for a long period visited his breast Herbert left the porch of the Institute.

"The Rector's wife, I suppose. Well, she has a dignified and graceful bearing, and a most superb voice. He's a fortunate man so far, and apparently he knows it."

Saying this he walked away hastily, not waiting to observe that the Rector of St. Mary's only handed the lady into the carriage standing outside, and that he himself stood looking after that same carriage as long as it was in sight, unmindful of the falling sleet.

"Wait patiently on Him, and He shall give thee thy heart's desires."

These words—these words alone—were repeating themselves in his brain. The tones of the voice in which they were sung were vibrating in his ears as Herbert Langridge sat until long past midnight gazing into the fire which

now in full ruddy glow illumined the heretofore dingy room at his hotel. He had extinguished the lamp; the firelight alone was more congenial to him in his present mood.

"And He shall give thee thy heart's desires."

"What desires," he thought, "and what heart? A heart in unison with Him—desires in subjection to His will?"

A panorama of his own heart's desires for the last ten years seemed te unroll before him. Had not his heart been straying farther and farther away from all spiritual influences day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, throughout all that time until now—until now? And what was he now? Whose fault was it? Was he not, even now, ready to lay all that accumulation of hardening worldliness upon one who was dead, and that one his mother? Was that true? Had he not blindly obeyed his own will, and seen nothing better than to follow his own will? A gentle voice had bade him above all things to fulfil his duty to that mother. Had he done so?

What a plain, bare duty was that he had given. How bald, how destitute of the

commonest attributes of filial love had been his conduct to that mother! How cold had been the feelings which accompanied all those choice and precious gifts which he had poured into her lap! How scornful were his receptions of her warm and appreciative acknowledgments! How bitter were his thoughts of her when in his rapid glances over her letters he found not the words he wanted to see! What blessing could follow gifts given in such a spirit? Not of such stuff was the counsel given him by that loved woman. His mother, too, had been deceived; she had taken the dross for gold. How could she think that the beloved son of her heart would send gifts in scoffing?

"Rest in the Lord." As he had listened to those words that night the scales seemed to fall from his eyes. Yes, he had been heartless all these years to the mother who had borne him. How could he look upon the face of her who had bidden him sacrifice love for duty, and had told him that his reward would come? Could he say to her in all sincerity, "I have done all that you bade me to do. In loving reverence have I served my mother, and my reward has been that her

heart was closed, that her ears were ever deaf to the voices of my supplications that were ever silently appealing to her." Alas! what voices were these? Could the worked gold and the precious stones, the tapestries and embroideries touch the finer portion of her woman's nature?

He had debased it and hardened it by pandering to a latent weakness—a weakness which had never been so fed before. He had nursed her love of pomp and parade, so long subdued by the higher power of maternal love. He had injured her as he had injured himself, through the pride of life, the pomp of wealth! Even now—but now—as he was nearing the goal, as he was approaching what he once looked forward to as his only earthly felicity, he was undervaluing the prize for which he had waited and toiled so long.

"Careworn and faded."

These depreciatory words had not so much annoyed him personally as they did by conveying to his mind what would be the estimation of the world at large. He wanted his wife to be the admired of all; he wished to be the envied husband of such a wife. He

had desired that he himself through the holiest affections should be elevated on a pedestal, and receive laudations from the crowd. A little shiver of discontent ran through him as he thought that he was about to bear back to India as his bride a lady who would be regarded as "careworn," "faded," and "precise."

Then again with quick revulsion of feeling he asked himself if all these newly-entertained accusations were true? Was he the unsouled thing he made himself out to be? Was he a worshipper of materialism only? Had they not been means to an end for which he had been really working, and that end to secure the sweetest companion and most helpful helpmeet any living man could possess? Was it not an unright thing to deem himself so debased, whilst hoping in the twilight hour, after all the burning heat of the days-man's toil had been borne by both that they should rest together in the cool of the evening hour? Was it good to hold an opinion so low of the man who sought to be that woman's husband? Had he been altogether absorbed by ambition, would his breast have kept that little untended taper burning

clearly so long—would not the rough winds of ignoble desires have quenched it long ago? Peace he had not. He had not "rested in the Lord" nor waited patiently for Him; but his soul was not sullied by any stain of impurity. The desires of his heart were not wholly alien from the perfect life, and "the peace that passeth all understanding" might yet be his.

"Henceforth I will strive to wait patiently," was his prayer that night.

When on his bed, tired as he was when sleep at last enfolded him in her restful arms, it was no image of the lost hamadryad of his youth that visited his pillow and stood by it as a dream; it was a tall, gracious figure, who held in her hands a chaplet of marygolds which she was about to place upon his head, whilst she sung in subdued tones, as if for him only, "O, rest in the Lord, beloved of my soul."

The morning was well awake, and awake with all the smiles a wintry sun can wear, when Herbert opened his eyes, refreshed in body and mind. The bells were chiming from some church near as he concluded a

rather hasty breakfast. They were old bells, and their sound fell gratefully upon his ears.

"Those bells are very sweet; I suppose they are much thought of?"

"Yes, we are all very proud of our bells," answered the hostess, who herself had come to inquire after his welfare, and how he had slept. "The bells of St. Mary are renowned for miles, and many a triple bob major has been scored by them. We are in the parish of St. Mary, so of course we stand up for our bells. And we like our Rector also; he has as true a ring in him as have the bells of his church."

"I suppose that the foundress of St. Mary's Guild is the wife of the Rector of St. Mary?"

"No, no; not quite that," said the landlady, smiling and shaking her head. "'Tis no fault of our Rector's, though, that she is not, so folks say. Well, well, it'll happen some day, sure, for he's waiting patiently enough, and them as wait always get what they want. She'll not get a better husband, though she's well worth any man, as sweet and worthy a lady as —"

But before these last words were uttered

Herbert had strode across the room as if he were not listening to the good woman's peroration, and, with a gesture of indifference, had taken up his hat and was about to leave the room abruptly.

"What time for luncheon, sir?" said the landlady, in a sharper tone, and with an air which was evidently rather ruffled.

"I hardly know; I will take what there is in the house. I may be detained."

"Umph!" said the landlady, "too proud to listen to the answer after having asked the question."

Gossip of any kind was distasteful to Herbert, and therefore it was that the moment the private affairs of the Rector of St. Mary's Church and the foundress of St. Mary's Guild were about to be discussed by the landlady, to him, a stranger, he had seized his hat and had unceremoniously quitted her without asking the one question which was really uppermost in his mind, namely, the way to the Collegiate School for Girls.

This question, thus deferred, he asked therefore of the house-porter outside as he left the hotel, and receiving for information that it was fully a walk of twenty minutes'

distance, and beyond the city; he started at a brisk pace in the direction pointed out, with a heart comparatively light and unburdened.

The Collegiate School was a handsome modern building, and the style of its architecture was of a character in accordance with the purposes of its structure, being more simple and severe than ornamental in its details. He had been told to ring at the private door on the right wing, and not at the middle gate if his purpose were to see the Lady Principal. His hand actually trembled as he did so, and for a few moments he looked blankly at the trim, exquisitely neat damsel who responded immediately to his summons without finding any words wherewith to address her. When he did so he merely ejaculated —

"Miss Myles."

"Miss Myles, the Lady Principal, sir, is not at liberty to receive calls until one o'clock."

"Take my card in to her at once, if you please."

"I cannot do so, sir; my orders do not allow me to enter the class-room except with a telegram."

Herbert felt irritated.

"I have come some distance; my time is precious. Let your mistress know immediately that I am here."

"I cannot disobey my mistress, sir," said the girl, with an offended air. "It is now past twelve; leave your card with me, and if you call at one, the Lady Principal will have left the class-room for the day. She is never there in the afternoon; she will then most likely receive you."

The damsel evidently perceived Herbert's irritation at this slight thwarting of his desires, and her last sentence was influenced by the wish to assert her dignity and to show him her responsibilities, as well as by an intention of soothing him by holding out the possibility of the whole afternoon for him if her mistress so willed.

Herbert had long been a ruling power—a small despot, as it were—and when obstacles were presented to him they were, apparently, as ninepins, which only stand up for the express purpose of being knocked over as soon as possible. He gave his card, however, and walked impatiently away.

The expression "Lady Principal" annoyed him above measure. He began to connect it

with the objectionable word "precise;" but, nevertheless, all unknowing as he was, he was already under a different teaching, and more tractable than he had been one day since, so that the absurdity of his fretfulness was soon apparent to him, and again the singer of last night and the words of the singer came back to him.

"How strange that that lady should come into my thoughts at this moment," he said to himself. It almost seemed like a treason that he should be thinking of any other woman than one. He suddenly stopped short in the midst of his rapid strides. "'Not his wife,' she said, 'but soon to become so.' Were not those her words? That voice, the Marygold Guild, our flower—what, what if she should prove to be—Good God! Shall I meet her only to find her the promised wife of that middle-aged rector?"

Every particle of colour faded from his face as this thought took possession of him; but the long habit of judicial reasoning to which he had been committed in the most important years of life's mental training, had greatly checked the imagination and idealistic faculty once so prominent.

"Absurd!" he said, resuming his walk. "Cannot a middle-aged rector have chosen an elegant-looking woman with a fine voice for his second wife, as I presume, without my rushing to the absurd conclusion that she might prove to be the very woman to whom I once plighted my faith and whom I have come here to seek? The Guild of St. Mary's takes its name from the parish of St. Mary, and if a badge were needed, what more suggestive than that they should choose a marygold, the flower of St. Mary?"

Never had one single hour seemed so long before. The minutes seemed to drag one after another. Often he took out his watch and held it to his ear, thinking that it must surely have stopped. The distant chimes of St. Mary's at last announced the coming of another hour, and before the last echo died away at the stroke of one, Herbert stood again at the door of the Lady Principal's house, nor waited long. The trim maiden responded immediately as before, and, without pausing, opened the door of an adjoining room and held it aside for him to enter.

No sooner had he passed the threshold of

the apartment indicated than he became conscious of an invisible presence. Simple, almost to severity, yet without giving any impression of bareness, the few pieces of furniture were all conspicuous for their perfection in taste. Books, engravings, vases, hangings, all told the same tale—not wealth, but refinement. It was evidently only a room for granting receptions, and although the eyes of the mind were chiefly gratified, there were yet one or two chairs easy enough to invite a temporary rest.

Herbert felt a pleasurable emotion rising within him, and drew a long breath; but what demon of doubt at this inopportune moment whispered to him, "careworn, faded, precise?"

He hastily walked to the broad bay window and had partly drawn one curtain to shade the too strong light. He did not want his first glance at that loved face to be too fraught with regrets. His hold was still upon the curtain when a slight sound made him let it fall from his hand. He looked round; a figure stood in the doorway—a graceful figure. He saw but the fine outline

of a pale face with an aureole of bright brown hair. He moved not—he could not speak. Two arms were outstretched to him ; a few quick, noiseless steps and a woman lay on his breast and clasped his neck; then, only then, as his head stooped to her face, then only one word escaped him —

"Mary," he said, and they held each other in a long and silent embrace.

A nervous tremor suddenly shook the strong man as he looked in silence on the fair, calm brow of the woman who clung to him, and spasmodically he clutched her still closer to him.

"Is it your very self, Mary? Your very self?"

"Am I so old and changed, dear, that you do not know me?" she whispered, bending her head back towards the light.

"There is something awful in your beauty. Why are you so calm? Have you not mourned at all through those years?" he asked, tremblingly.

"Were you not my husband all those years?"

"There seems such a gap between us. I am as far from you, though I hold you in

my arms, as far as the earth is from the heavens!"

"The heavens must bow themselves, then, and come down," she said, with a smile, and, lifting her face to his, she kissed him on his mouth.

CHAPTER VIII.

For we live by hope
And by desire; we see by the glad light
And breathe the sweet air of futurity;
And so we live, or else we have no life.

WORDSWORTH.

How the minutes glided, quite oblivious of the agonies of the kitchen potentate and the early dinner hour! The two newly restored to each other only thought of their present blissful reunion. At last, with an effort, Herbert wrenched his mind from the now to the future, and to its practical obligations.

"Now, my Mary, to plain homespun. On what day, at an early period, can you leave this place of exile?"

"Exile! I am under engagements that oblige me to stay until Christmas. I cannot leave until my successor is appointed, and

then there is the oratorio; but why leave until — "

"A fortnight after Christmas we sail for India, Mary, and I have much business to transact between now and then. I want to make sure of my precious possession in yourself at once, and I have, therefore, made arrangements with my aunt to receive you at Sunnyside until our marriage can take place at the earliest opportunity. You must, therefore, come out of your heaven of calm, and submit to a little vulgar bustling, so that you may be able to leave here in a day or two. Why, what troubles you so much in that thought that you change colour? Clouds already in the fair translucent heavens?"

With unfaltering voice she answered, quietly —

"I grieve to be obliged to say No, dearest Herbert, but it cannot be, I cannot go to Sunnyside, I cannot be married from your aunt's house."

She rose as she said this, and stood erect, looking taller than usual from her resolute attitude. They were tears even that shone in those eyes that but a moment before had

made Herbert tremble with their steady, placid light, and cower within himself at the thought that she was too high for him—she who could bear grief and separation without their leaving any marks; whilst they had seared him—heart and brow—as with a hot iron.

"Hither—hither," she said, in a low firm voice; "hither came I as to a refuge; here have I known peace—here, O, my Herbert," and her head fell upon his shoulder. "Here I have been honoured; here more than all I have felt what it is to be free. Sunnyside, as I now look back upon it, was to me then but a comfortable prison, where I could only keep alive my inborn love of freedom, by sometimes indulging in wild freaks which —"

A burning blush now overspread her whole face as the occasion of their first meeting came vividly before her.

Herbert Langridge understood what memory it was that their first meeting had conjured up, and saw how indecorous it might now appear after ten years' interval in the eyes of a Lady Principal, but his heart gave a quick flutter, for the picture of his hamadryad had ever brought him light in the

darkness. He said nothing, but drew her nearer to him.

"Mary," he said, tenderly, "my only wish has been to exalt you, if need be, in the eyes of the world, and to —" he paused, seeing how gravely she regarded him, "well, to do you honour—to have you honoured in a house where upon my account alone you met with discourtesy."

"Do me honour! do me honour!" There was a sudden gleam in her eyes, and a still warmer flush mounted to her cheek. "You mistake, Herbert; I would rather be married by a hedge priest like a ragged beggar girl than be taken to Sunnyside expressly that I might go forth thence as your bride in compensation —"

"My Mary! Athene of the tranquil brow, can then be angry," said Herbert, half smiling; "but is it well?"

"Yes, it is well. The sun shall not go down upon my wrath, but unless a certain vow made some years since could be turned inside out, you will yourself see that for that cause alone it cannot be."

"What vow, and by whom vowed?"

"Oh, the vow of an unregenerate one who

responded to a well-meant, perhaps sincere, courtesy on the part of Mrs. Hazelhurst, which expressed the hope of my visiting her occasionally, by a silent bow which sealed the unspoken words, 'Only as the wife of Herbert Langridge do I pass through these gates again.'"

"And that was your vow as you drove away from Sunnyside, was it?" said Herbert, tenderly, "after you had inculcated upon me the duty of passive obedience?"

"We were outside the gates, Herbert, and I was no longer in your aunt's employ."

"You are a casuist, Mary," he answered, smiling; "but let be, your vow shall have all due respect from me. But wherever the ceremony takes place, all arrangements must be hastily made, and preparations hurried forward, as my time is so short, and I have so much work in hand, and there is one thing which of itself will give me no end of trouble. I must secure a secretary before I go back, and to find a good one is no easy task."

"Let me be your secretary, Herbert."

"You, Mary, you! Do you suppose that even were you able that I should allow it for one moment? You, as my wife, must take

up a certain position. You have had enough drudgery in England; but in India, as my wife —"

An amused, half merry look banished every trace of recent shadows as she said —

"The glamour of India is upon you, Herbert, with all its paraphernalia of punkas, palanquins, elephants, and howdahs." She laughed outright. "Fancy Miss Myles, the governess, with a score of black slaves in turbans and tinsel fanning her! Who knows but in time she may learn to chew betel nut? Ah! woe is me if I may not work; your India then would kill me in a year; but again I say, let me be your secretary."

"Ah! I am already beginning to feel like a married man," said Herbert, laughing, "but there is one great obstacle, Mary, which you cannot get over. My secretary must have a good knowledge of Hindustanee."

"The candidate now soliciting for the post has a good knowledge of Hindustanee."

"What?"

"She has a good knowledge of Hindustanee."

"You, Mary?"

"Why, Herbert, how do you suppose that

I could have glided through those ten years without—"

"Without what?"

"Without being scored and wrinkled in every direction, and without my eyes being blurred and red with weeping! The learning of Hindustanee to make myself a helpmeet for my husband, has had a larger share in keeping me in sweet restful ease than even my guild or my bees, whilst I was waiting for you, waiting for you, my love, for I knew you would come back; I knew you would come back."

Herbert gave no answer. The awe that had mingled with his old admiration of far-gone days seemed to be again reasserting itself. He drew back the curtain still further, and looked at her in silence.

The action of moving the curtain brought to her remembrance how he was employed when she was about to enter the room.

"Why were you intending to draw the curtain, Herbert, as I came in? Did you wish to meet me in the darkness?"

Herbert looked at her. How could he tell her what had impelled him to do so? That he had been so faithless in soul as to quail

before the epithets "careworn," "faded?" Truth at all cost! Is that always the maxim for noble souls? Whether it should be so or not, or whether the subtle evasions of Eastern minds had somewhat impregnated his own we know not, but Herbert answered after a pause —

"Look at my forehead, Mary, and there you will read my reasons for placing myself in the shade."

"Mistrustful son of earth!" she answered, smiling, shaking her head as if the truth of this statement was open to dispute. "What a thought for such a supreme moment! But whence came such a squadron of marring lines? See, now, I will count them—one, two, three, four—why, there are ten, large and small," her fingertips touched them lightly as she spoke. "Ah, my love, your thirty years should not have stamped such signs upon your brow."

"Ten, are there? Then it is, indeed, a faithful record—one for each year that I was banished from your presence, Mary."

"Is it so? then I must needs love the record, though it might have been traced with a gentler pencil, but they shall not be to

me as a record of a bitter past, but the testimony of an ever-abiding truth; and now, with the persistency of a woman when desirous to gain her point, will you grant to me—supposing my capability be established—the post of secretary?"

"As you will, you very woman!"

"Then, having so far gained my way," she resumed, laughingly, "I must now reconsider your demands. I will send in my resignation this evening in order that my successor may be appointed as soon as possible. Then there is the oratorio to which I am pledged, and bitter indeed would be the disappointment to my poor girls if I should fail them. These duties and others, which I owe to my present position at Chippenham, once fulfilled, then I am yours—yours in will and in deed for ever—ever more."

"What is this about an oratorio, Mary?" said Herbert, his brows again clouding. "Am I to understand that you sing in public?"

"Ah! I have not told you that I have founded a guild here, to raise and dignify womanhood as represented by my poorer

sisters who work here in factories, and music is one of our chief educators. Once a year we give an oratorio, and I am pledged to sing one air on that occasion. My singing that one air once a year gives me more loving authority over my guild than — But, Herbert, you look displeased."

"As my wife," he answered, coldly, "you must not sing at oratorios."

"As your wife, no; as the wife of my Indian prince, no. But it will not be as your wife, dearest, that I shall sing at my last oratorio in Chippenham."

She laid a hand on each shoulder as she spoke and regarded him with anxiety.

"I know that it has become a fashion lately," he continued, gloomily, "for great ladies who have fine voices not to be content with singing in their own drawing-rooms, but, under pretence of charity, to seek the applause of the concert-room, and thus air their vanity. My wife must not do this."

"She *shall* not, Herbert. But, alas! for my girls—my dear girls who have looked up to me so long, and who love me as devotedly as I do them—if I fail them now — You do

not ask it, Herbert? Not yet being your wife, you will not ask it?"

There was no answer.

"I have had nothing but kindness and honour lavished upon me since I came here; and now that the supreme joy of my life draws near—the privilege of walking by your side, by your side, my dear"—there was a little sob—"until the goal of earth be reached—must I forget those who have helped me to pass these years of waiting so easily, so easily? Could you, could you ask it? You need not be present on that occasion if it so chafes you even to think upon; but it concerns my honour to complete certain engagements, and not to leave with one page, although the last page of my life here, rent asunder from those preceding it. For that evening the protecting presence of the Rector of St. Mary's will, as heretofore, be my ægis—if one be needed."

"The Rector of St. Mary's!"

"The truest, the best of friends. No breath of silly gossip could ever waste itself on a Lady Principal or foundress of a guild around whom he threw the shielding arms of his goodness."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. But why do you repeat 'indeed' with such a tone?"

"The Rector of St. Mary's and the Lady Principal looked truly a comely couple last night, but I knew not then that it was my own betrothed that he was so tenderly cloaking, and who left the hall hanging upon his protecting arm, and whom he accompanied home with his shielding presence."

"Ah! were you there? Were you the muffled figure in the porch whom I saw as I drove—as I drove away? Oh, my dear, dear love! and I knew it not!" Again her faithful, loving arms closed round her doubting lover's neck. "Herbert," she said, gravely, drawing back her head and steadily regarding him, "the Rector of St. Mary's has had the honour of the foundress you allude to thus, so much at his heart that he would not plant his foot upon the step of a carriage in which she sat. The Rector of St. Mary's walked home through the snow alone."

"He is a widower, I hear. Do not some people connect your name with his in another fashion?"

Her arms released his neck.

"Foolish tongues may wag for ever; those who heed them not can walk steadfast. The hot sun of India, Herbert, must have burnt into your brain to speak like this to me. Ten years since you trusted me in a graver matter than this, and asked no questions. Alas! my Herbert, this is worse than separation. But if I am on my trial, know that the Rector of St. Mary's is one of those priests who incline to think celibacy a better state for the clergy than marriage, and who shrinks with horror from any second nuptials. Had it not been so the Lady Principal, at thirty-six years of age, might have thought differently about the foolish tongues."

She was silent. Herbert took her hand and kissed it.

"You will forgive me, Mary. I am not as I was ten years since. I have much to unlearn, much to unlearn."

"And I much to learn."

"Not of me, my poor love; you can never learn of me."

"I learnt the best of all knowledge ten years ago from you, Herbert, and it can

never be unlearnt," she answered, calmly. "There, you were the sole teacher."

"Whatever was it?" he asked, again venturing to draw her close to him."

"Love!" she answered, firmly.

"I was but a pupil teacher, dearest, under you, under you;" and peace was again sealed, and the old trust began to return to his heart once more.

A faint, very faint, knock at the door caused Herbert to look at his watch.

"Why, my dear Mary, I have been here two hours! It is three o'clock. At what time do you dine or take luncheon?"

"At two, and my visitors are limited to ten minutes. No doubt the cook has been most alarmed."

"I have transgressed; I will now go. To-morrow night I go to London. At what hour may I venture to ask an audience before I start?"

"At the same hour as to-day."

"I will not forget then what is due to the Lady Principal of a girls' collegiate school, and will only stay the allotted ten minutes," said Herbert, laughing.

"If you please, the Rector called to inquire if you had escaped taking a chill last night, ma'am. He asked if he could see you, but I told him that a gentleman from foreign parts was with you."

"My own dear love," thought Mary, hardly heeding the girl's remark, "has surely learnt to be jealous! Would he have shown such symptoms if he had found me quite destitute of any womanly grace, whether of mind or body? Strange inconsistency of the human heart! It hardly seemed to bring him the gladness that I thought it would have done, to find that I was not even now altogether uncomely. He was all irritation, doubts, and fears. He has been sorely tried—sorely tried. I fear that he has trod the narrow path of duty, but failed to gather flowers by the way."

And strange, indeed, it was that he who through ten years of silent separation never had one moment's doubt of the constant devotion and faith of her whom he loved, should merely by the contemplation of her matured dignity of charms and grace, so utterly unexpected, have felt a sudden impulse of feelings never entertained before.

The solution of this odd problem of the heart was that for ten years he had been giving—giving, had been looked up to, and received honours, and able himself to bestow them, whilst at the same time he was indulging a secret sense of a great injustice—narrowing influences all of them.

He had made up his mind that his betrothed was suffering equally with him, probably more so. His pride through all his bitterness felt a noble consolation in a certain sense, in the daily reflection that were she spared to him he would repay all—he would shower gems upon her—would repay all her trials with every accessory that station and wealth can bestow.

He forgot for the time that all those things which he would have to give were valueless in her sight. But what else could he do for her? He could not restore her lost youth and loveliness. This bitter thought was often the sole companion of many a sleepless night. What fierce obstinacy flamed up within him when his aunt recalled to him that, over which he had so often himself pondered with heart-woe unspeakable—"careworn," "faded." Coming from her,

although they were but the echoes of his own thoughts, how he revolted from them in anger!

What impotent determination was his that at all price she should be admired—that he would raise her—that she as his wife should be honoured for that fact alone; and now, instead of being able to use that omnipotent power in a glorious spirit of defiance, he finds a still most attractive woman, in full enjoyment of her many talents and accomplishments, some of which—as her gift of song—were in fuller splendour and more developed than before. Moreover, a calm, rare-souled woman, enjoying her intellectual life, blessing all around her, and being blessed. A full life, apparently. What had he to add to it? He saw that he had nothing except himself, and he felt it to be a somewhat tarnished self from that other self which had won the heart of that incomparable woman ten years since. The old love had never relaxed its hold, but it had glided more into the region of a memory than a reality. He had, as it were, to resuscitate the old feelings before he could be glad in her beauty. Here was nothing for a noble pity to raise or

lift up. The old sacred, awful love of his unsullied, ardent young heart was reasserting itself, but with the alloy of jealousy. When that was cast out before the steadfast light of her purity he would again be himself.

All these thoughts, mixed with some shame, he revolved in his slow walk back to his hotel. Once or twice he was nearly upon the point of returning—returning to cast himself at her feet, and kneeling there, to tell her how bitterly he felt his own unworthiness, and to implore her to bear with him; but he checked the thought. He knew that her lofty spirit would be wounded by his self-humiliation.

"No, not by abject contrition from which I myself might afterwards recoil can I enthrone myself again in a heart like hers."

These were some of the regretful thoughts and musings to which he gave himself up, but poignantly as he felt a certain amount of commiseration for himself in that he had lost so much way, yet he felt that with her by his side, retrogression and progression would be one, even though the glowing poetry of his youth could not be revivified.

The thoughts of the Rector of St. Mary's as he also trod his way back dwelt exclusively on "the gentleman from foreign parts" so long closeted with the Lady Principal of the Chippenham Collegiate School, for the neat-handed Millicent had unnecessarily enlarged upon the circumstance of this visit of a strange gentleman. So unexampled a procedure as her mistress retaining a casual visitor for the space of two hours, was too great a strain upon her usually compelled reticence. The equipoise of her mind was disturbed. She had been accustomed to the stated calls of the Rector every other day, or at intervals not less than two days at the most, but he never stayed more than the allotted ten minutes.

In the summer time he went into the garden to look at the bees—it was wonderful how great was the attraction of Miss Myles's bees for him. He had bees of his own—her bees were an off-branching family from his own stock. He was an accomplished beekeeper, knew all their habits from minute observations of years, but yet it seemed as if he had always something to learn of a more valuable nature from the bees of the

Collegiate School. But when summer works were over the bees could no longer require his domiciliary inspection, so his calls were then expressly to inquire about his two little girls, aged respectively thirteen and eleven, who were scholars at the College; but then he never sat down on those occasions, but would stand hat in hand and exchange a few civilities, sometimes even objecting to the door of the reception-room being closed as not being worth the while, for he had only a few seconds to stay; he had just to ask a few questions about the Guild, of which he was so staunch a supporter and patron. The frequency of these visits excited no surprise in Mary's heart. His wife had been her dearest friend, her visits had been almost diurnal, and as they usually came together, Mary had been quite habituated to his intimate little calls before his wife died, which was now five years since, and she would have greatly missed them had they ceased with her death, although the character of them was necessarily modified.

A friendship between a man and woman when no thoughts of love or marriage are likely to obtrude, is more perfect than any

other, as well as more fascinating, and in this instance there was no such innovation as a possible lover to be dreaded which would have been destructive of the restful attachment in which adviser, brother, and pastor seemed all united in the person of Mr. Brereton.

Mary was attached to him; she appreciated his reverent and courteous behaviour, his careful watch over himself in all his intercourse with her, so guarded and yet so considerate and kind in all things, like indeed, a good elder brother. She had perhaps wondered occasionally, why he came so often to inquire about the bees; but she found the solution in the great gap made in his home by the loss of the intelligent companionship of his affectionate wife, and hastily put the questionable suggestion aside, and if anything were wanting to strengthen her reliance upon the disinterestedness of his attentions, it was the strongly asseverated opinions which the Rector avowed of the desirability of a celibate clergy, and of the great scandal of second nuptials.

"A gentleman from foreign parts has been two hours already with my mistress."

Mr. Brereton repeated this to himself with

some anxiety. For two or three years following upon her arrival at Chippenham, Miss Myles had been the subject of much speculation in the society there. She was so eminently attractive that there must be some reason why she was not already married. Of course she had met with a disappointment, but would soon forget it in a new conquest. After a very little while the community at large voted her a puzzle. They could not affix the term "disappointed" to a lady whose cheerful serenity was one of her most marked characteristics, and they could not accuse her of setting her cap, as the vulgar phrase has it, at anyone in particular, as her general attitude was one of lofty aloofness; but it was reserved for the rising medical man of the district, Dr. Swepstone, physician and surgeon, to promulgate another decided opinion, and quite explanatory, why a woman who had beauty and grace could appear so naturally oblivious to the superior advantages which matrimony offered her. And the way Dr. Swepstone arrived at his explanation of this physiological contradiction to the womanly proclivities, was in this wise. He knew that a wife was a necessary

adjunct to the medical practitioner. He was looking all about Chippenham and its suburbs to find a lady worthy of being Mrs. Swepstone. He wanted wealth with her, but he was sensible enough to know that a very attractive, amiable, and accomplished woman would stand him in more stead in his profession than a rich girl who did not possess those qualifications ; so he deliberated.

When, however, the new mistress appeared like a meteor on the dull manufacturing mind of Chippenham, his mind was made up. He would have preferred that Miss Myles had not been a lady principal, but nevertheless, here was an opportunity not to be lost. So elegant and lovely a woman had never before greeted his sight ; her fame for learning was obscured by her quiet gentleness, and what a voice ! He had means. What receptions he could give with her to preside ! Long extended visions of rising higher and higher on the social platform, helped on by such a consort, flitted before Dr. Swepstone. He was thirty-five ; there was no time to be lost. His mind was made up, and he called after his third interview with her at the Rectory, to offer her the honour of his alliance.

But he called at inopportune times, and was not admitted; he left his card, and his sister called and left hers; but Miss Myles gave but a cold glance at either and forgot them, so there was no help for it; he must make his proposals in a letter, a proceeding to which he was most averse, considering that his personality and its strong claims upon an universal admiration would thus be lost. However, he had no doubt of success; any woman would pause twice, he considered, before committing the egregious mistake of giving a refusal to the offer of his hand—any woman of sense, that is, who was gifted with sufficient discernment to be able to appreciate both himself and his position; and Miss Myles was a person capable of such discrimination. So he wrote. This letter was one of the many stereotyped productions of that class wherein the self love of the writer is so evidently the principal factor in the production that no finely-worded metaphors can obscure it. Hastily running her eye over the neat phrases which showed how utterly destitute the writer was of any real feeling, which want had compelled him to make use of the disguise of many high-flown

words, Mary laid it on one side with indifference; whilst she perused with real sympathy the many applications from professors and lecturers; often re-reading those latter with grave thoughtfulness and many pauses. These she replied to first and at full length, and afterwards, in a few courteously-worded lines, disposed of the whole affair of Dr. Swepstone's proposals in a few seconds, which note, Mary, pushing from her, left to be consigned to the local post with the heap of answers to the aforenamed much-to-be-sympathized-with impecunious lecturers upon every conceivable subject of science, literature, and art.

Dr. Swepstone was indignant, very indignant, but not for long. He well knew that no woman would be mad enough to refuse him in so decided a manner with no gentle suggestion of some *primâ faciê* reason why, it was "out of her power" had she been free to accept him. No, it was quite evident she was not free; she was a married woman living apart from her husband—his fault, undoubtedly; but still that was the bare fact. Miss Myles, assuming again her maiden name, was a wife, and, although perfectly

blameless as regarded her husband, was not blameless towards the Committee of the Chippenham Collegiate School for Girls, who would have considered a married woman ineligible, and whom she had, therefore, deceived.

Dr. Swepstone, having confided this explanation to his sister, suppressed his indignation, and gave Miss Myles, or rather the Lady Principal of the Collegiate School, his pity in its place. The Rev. Mr. Brereton, however, as head of the Committee, must be informed of it as a kind of sacred trust, to be used or not according to his discretion. The cold look of incredulity and disapproval that Mr. Brereton's face exhibited when Dr. Swepstone made the suggestion, merged into an amused smile when Dr. Swepstone gave some answer which led the Rector to suspect that his knowledge was the offspring of injured self-love, and he summed up the consideration of the matter very shortly by declaring that the lady herself by one glance could shatter a thousand such cobwebs spun of some distempered brain; an expression never forgiven by Dr. Swepstone. And yet now for the second time, as the Rector

walked away without having a moment's interview with Miss Myles, this same ugly cobweb seemed to float like thin gossamer threads across his mental vision in the words, "The gentleman from foreign parts is with my mistress to-day." Was it, could it be possible after all that the arrogant, odious Dr. Swepstone had some shadow of truth in the half-malicious assertions of his wounded self-love, uttered something like nine years ago? And had some wretched husband, bought off years since, now reappeared on the scene for the purpose of making more extortions? This thought was a momentary shock, whilst it dimmed the halo which, in his conception of her character, had enveloped the foundress of St. Mary's Guild with an atmosphere of sanctity, as she had been for him a strong living argument for the perfectibility of the creature under certain limitations. It was a momentary shock, that presently subsided before the chivalrous sentiment which suddenly took possession of him.

"It is for me to defend her, to stand by her firmly in her distress, to be a true brother. I will surely shield her and protect her from any consequences arising from an

early and ill-assorted union." He was impelled to return at once to confront the man who, presuming upon his title of husband, dared to molest her, but at the very moment that he formed this resolution the substantial and imposing figure of Dr. Swepstone, driven in his well-equipped Victoria, arrested his intention. Whilst hats were raised in mutual recognition, the Rector mentally brushed away the cobwebs, flinging them, as it were, whither they were first spun, and walked home with a lightened heart.

CHAPTER IX.

In things which are agreeable, even sinners unite themselves with the will of God; but the saints unite themselves with the Divine will even in things which are disagreeable and displeasing to self-love.

ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI.

ON reaching his home, the Rector of St. Mary's passed at once to his study and took his seat at the writing-table, whereon were piled some of the best theological writings of all ages. They were there for references, to be employed for a work on which he had been long engaged (which indeed, he had been preparing for years), and had written much; as the pile of manuscripts which he drew forth from a drawer witnessed unto. It had lately progressed, however, very slowly. Sometimes days, and even weeks, would pass and not one word would be

added to it; and at the rate of its production the Rector, now in his forty-sixth year, would certainly require to attain to a century of life here below before his exhaustive volumes could see the light. It was a strange fact that of late years he had not written at all, except after he had paid one of his short visits to the Collegiate School, or after some other occasion had been the means of bringing him into the society of the Lady Principal of that establishment. Still more noteworthy is it that a great impulse was ever given to this literary employment of his after every musical rehearsal at the Guild, and that anyone who could have obtained access to the Rectory garden on those particular nights would have seen a lamp burning in the Rector's study until far into the small hours. There was no one now in the Rector's home whose loving watchfulness would have endeavoured to restrain within due limits that long-cherished habit of thus encroaching upon the hours of rest. There was no one now to comment with tender expostulation upon those protracted vigils which left their mark upon the face, which met the wakening sun with sleepless lids,

although his fine frame and constitution seemed impervious to so great a strain.

On the morrow after a night so spent indeed, instead of weary listlessness, the Rector seemed invaded by a fresh accession of energy, tempered by a still more tender sympathy than usual. The sick man whom he would visit would realize unwittingly that the pressure of his hand was more fervent, and that the tones of his voice were deeper, or, as had been said on one occasion, "that they right thrilled through one, as if they came direct and straight from the heart." A sensation as of a blessing brought to him in some mysterious way would steal over the invalid, a glow at his chilling breast, and a lulling of all pain. With what wistful looks would his eyes follow the retreating figure of his pastor when he bade him farewell; and then he would turn on his side to sleep with a smile, as though a foretaste of the rest so near at hand had been brought to him by that benign presence.

Alongside the great sympathy of his nature there was, moreover, a still more dominant characteristic, in his inborn feeling of reverence. Had he been born seventeen

centuries earlier that frame of mind alone would have enrolled him among those workers who could live and breathe only in the sanctuary. In this nineteenth century world, however, in which he found himself, a contemplative life was not in the path of his duties. The same reverence for the Eternal which in the first centuries of the Church might have taken him to the cell and the ascetic life, in the requirements of the present age bore him to an active life for humanity. It was the same reverence, not transmitted, but incorporated with it, as the necessary outcome of that higher reverence. This reverence of the Creator in the created, this reverence of God in humanity, had kept him unstained and free from all soil in his passage through life. A power to himself, as to others, it was a power ever manifest, yet in a way so free from all that is usually associated with a manifestation of power over others, that no one could ever tell wherein it lay. No more dignified presence than that of the Rector of St. Mary's could well be imagined, nor one in which dignity was so perfectly free from the faintest shadow of haughtiness. The most disreputable of his

parishioners received the same deep courtesy that he would have given to a prince, and cowered sometimes before the greeting as with sudden shame and inner conviction of his worthlessness, feeling, as it were, some fragmentary sense of a divine presence in the world, whilst that deep-toned voice rung in his ears.

Mr. Brereton was not given to Biblical quotations, and not often was the name of the Blessed One upon his lips. There was a tale current at Chippenham how that the Rector one day upon suddenly meeting the most notorious reprobate of the place and stopping to greet him, the graceless blasphemer, out of mere habit, gave vent to a careless oath and invoked the Holiest. No apparent anger, no flashing of the eye sternly denounced the offender. "Blessed be His Holy Name for ever and ever!" said the Rector, and raised his hat, whereupon Dick Watkins, prize-fighter, bully, and gamester, under the contagion of the Good, pulled off his cap, and dashing it to the ground said, "Amen." Did a drunkard cross his path, and he, alas! was but too common in Chippenham, the Rector did not turn aside, but would

salute him as if he were sane and in his right mind. Some good people had expostulated with him, therefore, and had ventured to suggest that by so doing he was countenancing vice, at which for sole answer the Rector would smile. Upon such an individual as the above, when thus overcome by his inveterate weakness, the Rector would call the very next day, as though he were an invalid, and would behave to him with as much tender solicitude as if indeed his affliction had been involuntary, a disease, and not a sin. How often had the small spark of the inner consciousness within the offender been lighted up by this silent forbearance of a superior nature! A sense of grateful appreciation at this wonderful sympathy had several times been awakened in a soul apparently dead to every sacred influence, when not even a word of expostulation had been uttered.

It had been remarked by some who had the highest admiration for the man and his devoted life, that he had no sense of humour, and this was in some measure true, but in no wise was this deficiency the result of austerity. In the laughter of earth, in her joyous moods with "laughter holding both her sides" he

joined not. Noisy exuberance of all kinds he was averse to, and possibly his mind had little kinship with fun as it is generally understood; but the mirthfulness of Nature in its simplicity and calm serenity he was no stranger to. A bright and tranquil soul, so at least he appeared to be, one who saw only the deep things of life, but whose heart's love went out to the farthest and darkest corners of the earth. A cultivated soul, too, who allowed none of the good gifts which he had received to become obsolescent from disuse and neglect.

In his early manhood Robert Brereton had chosen the Church as his profession, and at about the same epoch he had also chosen his wife. At the time of either choice perhaps he had not felt the one or the other to be a necessity of his life, without which it would always be overshadowed. His deeper nature was as yet slumbering, the clerical life came to him from circumstances, and Marion Crawford became his affianced bride because he saw more of her than any other girl, and because she was worthy of a good man's love. But before he was ordained deacon a change came over him and his feelings. He doubted

within himself if the married state was one the most desirable for a Christian priest. The longing after holiness and the perfect life grew within him day by day, and the example of ages, he thought, had shown this to be more possible in the life of the celibate. And yet he was under an engagement to be married! Looking within at the man and his temperament, it may be questioned whether his attachment to Marion Crawford was ever of the nature of love. He himself at that time knew naught of this. The stronger impulse being the religious one, he concluded that divine love was of necessity the highest form of love, and that it was only to be expected that the lesser love—the love he felt for Marion Crawford—should burn within him with a fainter glow than that other which kindled his warmest aspirations, but, such as it was, it was that kind of earthly love which sufficed for the majority of men. It was for him, however, a source of many a midnight conflict, but though his engagement was unnecessarily protracted, no thought of cancelling it ever obtruded itself into his mind, nor ever did he suspect that the love he offered to this good girl was a secondary

feeling in him. She was twenty-five, and he thirty-two, when having been presented with the living of St. Mary's, he was roused to the consideration that if the marriage were any longer delayed he would indeed be chargeable with having behaved uncomely to his virgin, and therefore they were married. In that home to which he took his bride how smilingly the years passed! His wife thanked God every night for the husband He had given her. No woman was so blessed as she in her fond estimation. And the years glided on, and two daughters were born to them, and in the fifth year of their marriage Mary Myles came to Chippenham as the Lady Principal of the Collegiate School. How the two women cemented a lasting friendship the one with the other it needeth not to relate.

Marion Brereton was at once dazzled and charmed in her sisterly communion with a mind so superior to her own, and yet not so abstracted as that of her husband; in this association with the mind of a friend who was able to fill up some hours of her life which were unavoidably spent alone, when she seemed to be ever the gainer, whilst the sweetness of the giver removed all sensation

of inferiority. As for the Rector, he appeared at once to acquire a new vitality out of this bond between his wife and her new friend. The poet's happiness in such a partnership of affection was repeated in this sisterly friend, his wife and himself; those "two beloved women." The intellectual calm, the full soul, the many gifts of that friend were more to the priest than the beauty of person, on which he never allowed his own mind to dwell, and regarding which he answered abruptly whenever his lively Marion remarked upon it. The disciple of celibacy in the abstract, though the husband of a fair wife, never permitted himself to discourse on the personal charms of women; like Job, he had "made a covenant with his eyes."

Into this happy home where sweet discourse made glad many an hour of relaxation, Death came, and the Rector, after ten years of untroubled married life, was a widower. Now all was changed; into this desolate house the companion of his late wife could come no more. Great was the assiduity of would-be consolers when the appointed days of mourning were accomplished, and many were the aspirants to the task of filling up the void in

his heart. But the typical Protestant clergyman, followed by a flock of female devotees, with mothers' meetings, Bible classes, and Dorcas assemblings were not for the widowed Rector of St. Mary's. The office of overseeing these was relegated to others. The pious ladies must carry on their good works without his co-operation. His duties were by the altar, in the pulpit, by the sick bed, in the home of the penitent or the sinner.

The formation of a Guild for working girls had long been a favourite project with Miss Myles, and had also been the subject of many an evening's conversation between the three friends, when all the possibilities of the scheme, and the necessary preliminaries to be used in order to insure its success as a means for bringing a more feminine development into the class for which it was designed, were amply discussed. Opportunities for receiving evening instruction on various subjects were to be elaborated and organized; but above everything else the cultivation of music was to receive the greatest attention. The capability of these girls for studying the art practically had been abundantly proved. The Rector was solicited to be the head as

well as the patron of the intended Guild, and the Lady Principal of the Collegiate School, as the Foundress, was also elected to act as Lady President. Its name was chosen by the Rector, who desired that it should be called the Guild of St. Mary's, after his church, and because the institute in which the meetings would be held was also situated in the parish of St. Mary's. One of the committee very pertinently remarked that the name of the foundress was also Mary, and that decided it. The musical classes, for which elementary tuition in singing was given by teachers selected by Miss Myles, met once a week for the practice of oratorios in the concert room of the institute, at which times the Lady President consented to be present, but with closed doors. The Rector was also asked to give to these meetings the double sanction of his presence, both as a compliment and as a token of respect due to the foundress, who would otherwise be unsupported, and to this he heartily assented. He was theoretically a musician, and perfectly understood and appreciated good music.

Thus for four years without a break, except during the time when an epidemic almost

decimated the town, the Rector of St. Mary's and the foundress of St. Mary's Guild met once a week in the hall of the Literary Institute. There were other meetings, but they were so brief that they hardly amounted to anything more than an interchange of friendly greetings.

Mr. Brereton, outside his life of duties, had one simple pleasure which savoured of husbandry, namely, bee-keeping. It had survived his boyhood, his college days, all changes, until the time of Miss Myles's arrival at Chippenham. It was a happy coincidence that the new head-mistress was found to have the intention also of keeping bees, as by herself bringing bees into her little garden she would avoid, maybe, a continually frustrated longing that they would come of their own accord to seek it. The hum of insect life was as sweet to her ears, as has before been remarked, as the colours of flowers, and the forms of plants, were grateful to her eyes. The mutual taste was the initial bond of friendship between the Rectory and the School-house. Here the Rector and Mary were in the positions of teacher and pupil. His character possessed in an eminent degree

the patience and clear insight required for an observer in the natural sciences.

No other distraction throughout his life had ever brought to bear upon him so many calming influences as the study of those wise little people. In the first days there was much to tell, much to watch over; and until the hives were well established the Rector was almost a daily visitor to the garden of the Collegiate School. Later on, these visits subsided to twice or thrice a week. When the bees, by reason of the wintry season, were not, as has been observed, the motive for his frequent visits, there were his two little girls, in whose studies, as their father, he was, of course, much interested. And thus the years sped on, and in all the time succeeding upon her friend's death Miss Myles had not crossed the Rectory threshold but once, except on those official occasions when the Committee of the Guild met in the Rector's library for the transaction of business, and a carriage always took Miss Myles home, which was an effectual preventative to any necessity for an escort.

Only once had she crossed that threshold alone, and upon what occasion? It was during

the time of the epidemic, when Guild and musical meetings were suspended and half of the well-to-do inhabitants were dispersed, the Rector and Miss Myles, with the medical staff, being left comparatively alone. Miss Myles had closed the school some weeks earlier than usual as a precautionary measure, holidays not being far distant. The Rector had sent his daughters to the seaside, and urged that the mistress should withdraw also for a time.

"And yourself?" she had asked.

"I stay here with my poorer brethren," he had said.

"And I also," was her quiet rejoinder.

His girls were in safety, and therefore, without any misgiving, the Rector devoted himself heart and soul to the work before him. As the illness was diminishing, and when all apprehensions for him personally seemed to be unnecessary, he, however, succumbed. The strength and fine health that had warded off the disease at first had become enfeebled by excessive and continuous exertions, and all Chippenham was convulsed to hear one morning that their Rector had been suddenly laid prostrate,

that he was attacked by the disease in its worst form, and that his life was in great danger. A skilled nurse was promptly procured and the highest medical advice engaged, by whom it needs not to be stated. Every day Mary inquired at the Rectory door, and every day turned away heavy at heart, for the daily bulletins were not encouraging: "Delirium great, and excessive exhaustion."

At last, after three weeks, came a more hopeful answer. The nurse went down to see her herself, and reported with a smile that there had been no delirium during the night, that the patient had slept, and the pulse was fuller and less quick. Was it well considered that Miss Myles, with a throb of grateful joy, determined to see him, if allowed, on the following day? The disease was not contagious, and she had no work to do; the school was closed, and the days were very dreary.

With a basket of flowers and fruits, she presented herself on the following morning at the Rectory and laid her petition before the nurse.

"Yes, I think there will be no objection.

He mentioned you yesterday, and seemed gratefully impressed upon hearing that you were well. He is sleeping now. Come with me softly into the room, and when he awakes he will be refreshed and able to see you for a few seconds. You may exchange a few words, no more. And this is only a concession to you, because you are so well skilled in all that a sick-room demands; and you are, moreover, so valued a friend."

And Mary, standing at some distance timidly aloof, looked upon the altered face of her friend with compassion and dismay. Quietly, and without any sound or rustle of garments, she deposited her flowers in her own tasteful way about the room; and was still standing with some in her hand hesitating where to put these last when the sick man opened his eyes.

"Who is that?" he said, faintly, but calmly, to the nurse, who hastened to rearrange his pillows.

"Miss Myles," she whispered, with a reassuring smile.

"Send her away—send her away!" he cried, excitedly. "Go! go! go!" he said, trying in vain to raise his arms to wave her off.

The nurse made a sign; Mary stole away to weep outside the door. Half-an-hour passed, when the nurse emerged.

"It must not be repeated," she said. "He does nothing but moan and murmur, 'That precious life!'"

And this was the man who, returning the second time from the School-house, bore with him the maid's remark, "The gentleman from foreign parts is with my mistress again to-day," and now sat down before his writing-table and proceeded to examine the manuscripts of his forthcoming works, the one entitled, "The Crown of Virginity; or, Celibacy as an Ordinance of the Church: a manual for those intending to present themselves for Ordination to the Diaconate," which treatise had been commenced in the years of his betrothal; and the other, "The Heinous Sin of Second Nuptials in the Christian Priesthood," the offspring of his pen since his widowerhood.

The Rev. Robert Brereton turned over page after page of this latter work in an absent manner, as though the words there were perceived by his eyes but received no

intelligent meaning therefrom. All sense in those manuscript sheets was in reality blotted out by the shadow of "a gentleman from foreign parts" which intervened between his sight and the pages lying before him.

Not one of the group of holy women gathered into the annals of the Church from every age had been ever presented to his mental vision as clad in a more snowy robe of purity than the foundress of St. Mary's Guild, and to think that an earthly cloud under the substantial form of some graceless husband was about to interpose itself before that radiance was fraught with sorrowful forebodings. Why should he conclude that this unusual visitor, who made such unprecedentedly long stays, must be a husband? Recognizing whence originally came this suspicion he pushed back his papers with as much decision as he had flung back the suggestion of Dr. Swepstone some eight years since, and leaving his seat by the writing-table went to the fire and, leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, gazed into the dancing flames intently as if seeking through them some solution for his doubts. From this attitude he was aroused by the arrival of the

gentleman acting as Secretary to the Collegiate School, who requested an audience. Placing a chair by the fire, he drew his own opposite the Secretary and awaited his communication, which he seemed in no hurry to make, but sat without speaking and somewhat abstractedly all the while twirling in his fingers what looked like a letter.

"Perhaps you have already heard and know that which I have come to tell you," said the Secretary at last, looking at the fire, a vague and not very lucid observation, and not certainly one which carried its own explanation with it.

"Heard what?" said the Rector.

"Then you have not heard?" remarked the Secretary.

"No; I have not heard."

The Rector's thoughts were quite away, and he answered mechanically. It was, he supposed, some question of funds and money matters connected with the Collegiate School. The Secretary was a slow-speaking man, who loved to take his time; it would come out presently, but the Secretary most unexpectedly and contrary to all precedent abruptly discharged his shot forthwith.

"Well, we are going to lose our head-mistress."

It was not a shot; it was a volley in its effects, for the Rector sank back in his chair unable to answer. Here was the dark cloud closing round him with a swiftness quite out of his calculations.

"Here is her letter of resignation; of course worded in the sweetest manner, but decisive nevertheless," and the Secretary handed the letter to the Rector, who took it, but held it in his hand without offering to read it.

"No reason given?" he asked, after a pause.

"One that is quite conclusive in its way; merely that an event which she had long contemplated as likely to occur at any time has taken place, and that she would be required to leave England for India in the course of a few weeks."

"The scoundrel!" mentally ejaculated the Rector.

"If anyone could have any power to induce Miss Myles to reconsider this decision it would be yourself, Rector."

"I will see her to-morrow morning; not that I have much hope about it.

"No," continued the Secretary. "I know that she is not a lady who acts from any light or trivial motive."

"No."

"It has no reference to income, or that could be soon got over."

"Yes."

How laconic the Rector was! The Secretary had expected some warmer expressions of regret at the great loss the school would sustain in this projected withdrawal. The Secretary rose.

"You will see the Lady Principal early to-morrow, and use your influence?"

"Yes, but it will be of no use."

When the door closed upon his visitor the Rector sank back again into his chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Lost, lost to me for ever!" he groaned.

Half-an-hour afterwards the Rector, having replaced all his manuscripts in the drawer whence he had taken them, took up his hat, which he had cast upon a chair. Summoning his housekeeper, he said —

"I am going out for sick calls. Take no account of dinner; but tell Miss Margaret that I should like her to come to me in my

study this evening after she has prepared her lessons," and the Rector went forth with grief at his heart to carry the sunshine of the good tidings to the heavy-laden and the weary.

Margaret Brereton, the eldest born, was the counterpart of her father—a fine nature, not buoyant and vivacious like the younger sister Lilian, but thoroughly deep and true, with somewhat of the repose and sunlit depths which characterized the foundress of St. Mary's Guild. She had not inherited her father's intellectual capacity, but shared with him in a minor degree

> The reason firm, the temperate will,
> Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.

"What a pearl of great price art thou, my Margaret," said the father, as re-entering his study, he found his daughter already there awaiting his return. "If I had had to ring for you, child, it is just possible that I should have declined to send for you. I am very tired, and shall be but a sorry companion. Nevertheless, I am glad that you have come. Now don't ask me to talk, my dear. Go on prattling of your own affairs—school work and so forth—and I will be the listener," and

the Rector drew her chair close to his and took one of her hands in his own, and Margaret, glancing at her father's face, saw therein what she had sometimes seen before, after sick calls and death-bed visitations.

"Perhaps someone has died this afternoon; perhaps old Betty Gummeridge, poor old soul; but I won't ask," she thought, and Margaret, in a subdued voice, recapitulated all the events of the week in that world which she alone knew. Necessarily the name of the head-mistress was often on her lips, and frequently she asked questions to which she got no other answer than a little pressure of the hand which lay on the knee of her father; or an occasional "Go on talking," when she paused to regard him with wistful looks, being fully convinced that he had not heard one word of all that she had been saying. At last the talker herself succumbed, the broken words came out in fragments, and her head drooped upon her father's shoulder.

"My poor little Maggie! What a brute I am!" said the Rector, starting. "Go to bed, my dear. What a shame to keep you up so long after your usual time."

"I am so sorry, dear father," said Margaret, piteously.

"Your sweet voice has refreshed me greatly. Good-night, darling," said the Rector, embracing her.

"But you will go to bed too, will you not?" she asked, pausing at the door.

"Yes, Margaret, before long."

"Before long." When the heart is oppressed with any burthen, to lie down to sleep is a vain delusion; better to watch and wrestle with the grief until sleep comes of its own free will.

Mr. Brereton extinguished his lamp and replenished his fire. He would argue out the whole matter at once alone, and in the quiet of night. There was now no doubt about it—he would soon be deprived of the light of that woman's presence, and henceforth he must walk in darkness. This proposition was not, however, admitted by him without encountering stern opposition. He was not a man to lose sight of the first claims which the Church had to his affections and to his life devotion; but the conflict was severe.

Hour after hour passed, and the last embers

of the fire were dying out when a more subtle question obtruded itself.

"If after all she is not married!"

A bound of the heart followed this thought.

"If it were the will of God," he pursued, listening to the suggestion; but the moment it was entertained the same moment the thought was flung aside as coming from the fountain of evil.

"God help me!" murmured the Rector, and he wept.

There was a light, scarcely audible footfall near; the Rector lifted his head. By the flickering ashes he saw a glimpse of a figure clothed in white. At any time his mind was ready and his heart open for any seraphic visitant.

"Who art thou?" he asked firmly.

"Father," said a gentle voice, as a little form clad in night apparel glided up to his side, "father, who has died?"

And the father, clasping his daughter to his breast, cried —

"Truly, child, you are my good angel; but why have you done this?"

"I thought somebody had died, father, that you cared for very much. I have seen

you look so before when people have died, and I thought you would not grieve so for poor old Betty Gummeridge, and so I listened, and listened to hear you go to bed, and at last I came to look for you."

"With no thought for yourself; no dressing gown, no wrap, this chill, foggy night."

The Rector took from a bureau his travelling maude with which he swathed her round.

"Now that I have made you like a mummy I must perforce carry you or you will unroll by yourself," and he caught her up in his arms, notwithstanding many a loving protest, which ended in her laying her head on his shoulder and clinging round his neck.

"Good-night, Margaret," said the Rector, as he closed his daughter's bedroom door after him; "we shall both sleep soundly after this."

"My father did not tell me after all who has died," thought Margaret, as she laid her head upon her pillow.

CHAPTER X.

In a word we should look upon all things which may happen to us as from the hand of God. I say this that we may avoid the delusions of many who say—If I were in a desert, if I were in a monastery—if I were anywhere else but here—I should become a saint. They say I should do—I should do.

St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

Another light had been burning through the small hours simultaneously with that in the study of the Rector of St. Mary's, but in this case the watcher was a woman, a woman to whom had come that morning, as she herself had said, "the supreme joy of her life," the realization of her hopes, the fruition of love, for which she had calmly waited, nor doubted ever, whilst youth, the era of love, was year by year passing away.

The fine health and the style of beauty possessed by Mary Myles had warded off the

withering effects of time. Of this she was calmly conscious. A film of fretful discontent too often spreads itself over the lives of women, and, like aphides on flower blooms, eats away their beauty faster than the usual decay of time; and not much less fatal are the habits of luxury and indulgence to which so many are pledged. At thirty-six Mary Myles was still very beautiful. The long life of work, loved though it had been, was now over, and the lover for whom she had waited was come at last. Why, then, did she sit upon that evening following upon his coming with clasped hands, hour after hour looking into the fire with an aspect as if she were revolving thoughts as grave as they were deep? Hers was now a face with whose gravity was also blended a touch of pathetic sadness. No such cloud had hung over that broad brow since the agonizing night in which, overcome by passion, she had cried aloud in her anguish, "They have taken away my love, and where shall I find him again?" In that dark hour she had lifted up her soul to the Eternal and made a compact with herself evermore to abide in peace. "Daughter, give me your heart," had been

an appeal to her from the Infinite, as it has been for centuries to the seekers after spiritual life.

Was it after all a rending of an idealistic vision, this return of her lover, this husband of her youth as she always fondly held him to be? She, who above all would rather have been a Beatrice than any living wife, however happy, could she not recognize in him the Dante of her aspirations? Where was the promise of his youth? Was she after all to be the victim of moods and tempers—she who was conscious of a growth in herself? She had thought out after her own fashioning how the glowing, ardent youth, so full of poetry, must have developed into something grander and nobler still, more calculated to command her adoration than the beardless boy to whom she had dedicated her life? Was it all an illusion? Did she not recognize in this prematurely aged man the attributes which had won her? Was this suspicious, arbitrary, irritable, and restless lover the Herbert Langridge who had thought of her as the hamadryad of the chestnuts?

These, in sober truth, were the thoughts

that took away all sleep from her eyes on that night after their first meeting.

Unbidden images of the many worthy men who had sought in vain to win her affections passed before her; she could not help it—memories like dreams come without solicitation. She had withheld her heart for the best one; she "must needs love only the best," and she had woven round Herbert Langridge the many rayed garment of her fancies until he had seemed, indeed, the very best—the best in his youthful promise—how far the best in his manhood's prime! And he was here, and her heart had been more troubled, and more tears had come to her eyes in their first interview than she had been acquainted with for years. She, who had thought that she had overcome all weak emotions, had again succumbed to their influence, had been betrayed into anger, into something very like peevish impatience. All this she reviewed, but she did not swerve from her fealty to him whom she had for ten years recognized as her husband. Hers was a truly loyal soul, but a deep pity took the place of admiration, and strange it was that the large compassion and scheme of

compensation that Herbert Langridge had nursed and brought over with him from India to be generously poured out at the feet and for the service of the wasted idol of his youth, was by a singular reversion to be dedicated to him by her for whom it was intended. His early disappointment, if it had not permanently changed his nature, had obscured its finer quality. This deterioration, she thought, would not have occurred had she been by his side. The remainder of her life was then at all cost due to him who had suffered so great a loss indirectly through herself.

But warped though he was from a too exclusive dictation of every faculty of mind and spirit to means for an end, the Herbert Langridge of ten years since was not utterly wrecked in his pursuit of honours and wealth. His devotion to the memory of one woman alone, his persistent constancy, his purity of life were enough in themselves to redeem any man, and all these he had kept as a sacred deposit. What then was to hinder him from calling back to himself again the finer essences of being that had faded out of sight in uncongenial surroundings? He reflected with

a shudder upon what might be the possibility from future daily contact with imperiousness and restlessness upon the impressible nature of the woman who loved him. In the silent hours of communing with himself that very evening he asked what right he had to dictate to one who held within herself such evidence of right-judging and right-doing? Was it not unbounded arrogance to ask concessions to his pride from such a woman? Could he not confidently leave to her the maintenance of her own dignity? "It is my own ignorance, my Anglo-Indian prejudices that alone blind me to the true nobility of her position here." It was, therefore, in a mood much less captious and resentful towards "girls' Collegiate schools" and guilds, and all the world in which his future wife had been dwelling so long, that Herbert sought her the next day, and in a few manly words left to her all future arrangements preliminary to their departure for India; and her lamp was not burning that night when St. Mary's chimes, in slow and measured cadence, told that another day was near.

"Millicent, when Mr. Brereton calls show him into my private room."

Such a command was another surprise to Millicent, and almost as great a one as the long visits of the "gentleman from foreign parts" on the two preceding days. No gentleman had entered this sanctuary during her ministrations, not even the mysterious "gentleman from foreign parts," whose name she persisted to ignore to herself, although compelled to repeat it in its integrity when announcing him to her mistress.

Mr. Brereton felt immediately that something was going to be revealed, when he was ushered into Miss Myles's holy of holies, the very perfection of simplicity and elegance, yet not destitute of the more enjoyable quality of cosiness.

"I am quite free this afternoon, and I hope, Mr. Brereton, that you will be able to give me a little more of your valuable time than usual. I have great need of your counsel."

It was coming then; but nevertheless she did not look troubled—did not look as if she were under the thumb of a scoundrel of a husband! As Mary had taken the initiative, he sat down in the chair placed for him opposite to her, and waited; but Mary, full

of regrets at leaving Chippenham and all the associations that bound her to the place, felt herself restrained at the very onset, and also remained silent. The Rector noticed her embarrassment, and said gently —

"Is it in reference to your late communication to our Committee, which was placed in my hands last night by the Secretary, dear Miss Myles, upon which you wish to consult me?"

"Hardly that, Mr. Brereton, as that admits of no reconsideration."

The Rector looked at her again; no, she was not so self-possessed as usual.

"You have only to command me," he said, earnestly; "if my poor services can be of the slightest use to you—if you are—that is to say—in any difficulty."

"The difficulty is not with myself, save that, as you may imagine, it gives me no small pain to be obliged to leave Chippenham—to leave you."

"Then I infer the obligation to go, as you conceive it to be, is not of your own seeking?"

"Oh! I must not say that—I cannot say that," she replied, with more animation. "It

is no less a joy than a duty which takes me hence."

"These scoundrels are always adored by the best of women," said the Rector to himself.

"But there are very few joys quite unmixed with pain," she continued.

"Is your only pain now, Miss Myles, in the fact that you are going to leave us? How am I to help you in that? What counsel can I give you here? That will be shared by all in Chippenham. This unexpected resignation is nothing less than a blow to the whole community. I speak not of myself; God forbid that I should express any selfish considerations on this matter. I speak for the whole of Chippenham."

"It seems almost a treason to say that I am sorry, or else I, too, would say that I am very, very sorry."

Mr. Brereton looked full at her, there was something so sympathetic in that look that she felt compelled to speak out.

"You see, dear Mr. Brereton, that we have waited so long—we have not even met for ten years," she said, almost apologetically.

Mr. Brereton made a slight gesture of impatience.

"Something is due," rejoined Miss Myles, in a firmer tone, as she noticed this movement, "to my future husband for his almost unparalleled constancy; hence it is, that I feel compelled to consult his convenience alone, and to leave my post at a shorter notice than courtesy would otherwise demand, but Mr. Langridge has to leave England to return to India in the beginning of January."

The unconnected and tortuous manner in which Miss Myles, in a style so unusual to her, had hitherto evaded a direct explanation of her motives for leaving, had been misconstrued by Mr. Brereton into a confirmation of his suspicions, but he had followed her last words with attention, and now saw the whole skein unravelled. She had not come to Chippenham in the double character of wife and spinster, and she was clear from all such imputations. The whole tale of patient constancy and devotion, which that one sentence revealed, was one sure to commend itself to the admiration of such a man as the Rector of St. Mary's. He did not

speak; he was gathering up all the links of the chain, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Would it not be treason to say that I am sorry?" she said, gently, and she laid her hand on his.

He did not withdraw his hand, as he would have done at any other time had her soft palm touched his, but took her hand and held it in both his own.

"It would indeed be treason to say you are sorry, my dearest friend. None of us may say we are sorry. All who suffer from your departure must rejoice in your joy. God bless you," and he rose to go.

"Do not leave me yet, Mr. Brereton. I have some requests to make. I will ring for tea."

The Rector sat down.

"I stay for the oratorio."

"That is well."

"And I wish to be married at St. Mary's."

"Naturally," answered the Rector, in a half absent manner, as if he were not addressing himself to her.

There was again silence.

"And you also desire me to perform the ceremony, I suppose?" he said, without, however, looking at her.

Miss Myles hesitated to give the answer that was longing to rush from her lips. Could Mr. Brereton have any objection, that he manifested no kindly readiness to anticipate her questions so as to relieve her from embarrassment?

"It is rather an awkward position for me, as you see, Mr. Brereton, to settle this matter quite by myself. I should not have undertaken it had you not been so old and valued a friend, and, of course, I am not a girl, but the Vicar of Sunnyside, of whom you have often heard me speak, would, I know, perform this office gladly if you would kindly lend him your church. Mr. Langridge proposed him in the first instance, but then I shall still have to ask you a favour."

Her voice faltered; the attitude of Mr. Brereton made the having to arrange her own marriage indeed difficult. Her thoughts at this juncture suddenly conceived the possibility that the Rector in his enthusiasm for a celibate clergy had lost all sympathy for the institution of marriage, and that perhaps he would have preferred her own life in the future not to have been so dedicated. A slight flush therefore overspread her counten-

ance, as finding that she was not going to be helped, she added —

"I should have to ask you to give me away."

"I could not give you away; no, I could not give you away," said the Rector, with abrupt energy; "that I would not do."

"Mr. Langridge left all the arrangements to me; but I think when I was so ready to take them upon myself I made a great mistake. I thought all would have been so very easy."

"Your tea is very good, Miss Myles; I will take another cup," said the Rector.

Mary poured him one out and handed it to him.

The Rector stirred his tea and looked at it thoughtfully, as though that was engrossing his every consideration at that epoch, but after awhile he put it back on to the table, and, pushing it away from him, he raised his head, and, with rather a forced smile, said —

"Do you not think now yourself, Miss Myles, that it would have a very curious appearance for me to give you away in my own church?"

"Of course it would, Mr. Brereton; so indiscreet a suggestion would not have emanated from me if I had not thought that you had some objection to perform the ceremony."

Her voice trembled.

"What objection can I possibly have, dear Miss Myles?"

The Rector looked full at her.

"None that I know of," said Mary, and tears rose to her eyes.

"Any priest would think it an honour. Then why not I?"

"It is myself who will be honoured, as I have always been, by your friendship, Mr. Brereton."

Mary here fairly broke down, but she turned aside and succeeded in checking the rising sob.

The Rector passed one hand across his brow.

"Is the room too hot for you, Mr. Brereton? Shall I open the door? The fire is somewhat large."

"No, thank you; we are always used to large fires here in the north. I have been working rather hard lately, and have been

sitting up at night a little longer than usual, so have just got a slight headache. It is nothing. Your tea is doing it good," and he drew the teacup nearer to him again.

"There is a great deal of sickness about, is there not, Mr. Brereton?"

"Yes, especially among the old folk," said the Rector, as he emptied his cup. "Had I not better call upon Mr. Langridge and talk it over with him? At what hotel is he staying? Or, if he would call upon me, would it not be better still?" said Mr. Brereton, as he again rose to go.

"Herbert Langridge left Chippenham last night, and will not be able to come down again until a day or so before —"

"Indeed! then you are to be defrauded of your courtship after all?" cried the Rector, with a sudden attempt at sprightliness. "I really did not understand." He paused a moment as he took up his hat, then, turning round, he said, "I will see you again in reference to this; but when you write to Mr. Langridge kindly tell him that I expect that he will make my house his home upon that occasion—and also your friend Mr. Ashcroft. It will give me the greatest

satisfaction if Mrs. Ashcroft will also accompany the Vicar. Yours will be, I presume, what is termed a quiet wedding, but a lady will be necessary to preside, be the guests few or many, for, in a few words, I wish to convey to you that which I have at heart, which is, that your wedding be kept at the Rectory, and my two dear girls be your bridesmaids. You see I am speaking now very peremptorily, like an elder brother. It will relieve you and simplify everything if I take all this arrangement upon myself, and so I ask you, in the light of the aforesaid elder brother, to leave it all to me. You can trust me, I think, not to do anything at variance with your own code as regards taste, which, I believe, is almost identical with my own."

"My kind, best friend!" cried Mary, and she held out both her hands to him.

As they stood there in the fire-glow, who would not have said that they were a couple who were designed by Nature for each other? The fitness of age, their moral attributes and intellectual gifts, and the exceptionally fine personal appearance of them both would have almost justified the old most-mistaken saying —that marriages are made in heaven.

Mr. Brereton gazed long and fixedly upon the face of the woman turned to him with such a beaming look of grateful appreciation, and whose hands were resting in his own.

"An ante-nuptial benediction," he said, "rests upon you both for your mutual constancy and truth—the benediction of the Church it will be my privilege to bestow. God bless you, dear Miss Myles." He raised one of the hands she had resigned to him and slightly touched it with his lips, "God bless you!"

Mary would not trust herself to speak, but accompanied him to the door. A cold blast blew on them both.

"Pray go back, Miss Myles, the wind is chill and piercing," and he shuddered.

As he heard the door close behind him he drew a long breath. "Thank God it is over, and I have not betrayed myself. My path now lies straight before me," and with a firm step he strode down the dark road homewards.

CHAPTER XI.

Spring days are gone, and yet the grass we see
Unto a goodly height again hath grown;
Dear love, just so love's aftermath may be
A richer growth than e'er spring days have known.
S. WADDINGTON.

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Hazelhurst had felt greatly relieved after her nephew had called upon her; during which interview he had acquainted her that his future bride and himself, after mature deliberation, had arrived at the decision that it would on all accounts be more befitting that their marriage should take place at Chippenham, where Miss Myles had for so long had so many interests; yet she was not without sharing a most lively curiosity with Helen to know the details of an event which she still secretly very much regretted.

Helen had been much disappointed at the change of plans. She had looked forward with great pleasure to the prospect of seeing her beloved friend, for such she always faithfully, and without any swerving, deemed the lady who had won her affections whilst she was superintending her studies. She had in no way been influenced by her mother's depreciatory observations in regard to the change in that lady's personal appearance. Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen had both driven to Dr. Grantham's funeral, and at some distance had both seen Miss Myles, but as she was closely veiled it was quite obvious to Helen that her mother could not have been able to make very critical or trustworthy investigations, and that the expressions of "careworn," "faded," "precise," "middle-aged woman" which frequently fell from Mrs. Hazelhurst's lips were more the offspring of her foregone conclusions than the results of her own vision. Helen really knew Mary better than her mother, and had often suspected that her very severe style of dress was really assumed as a disguise or veil for the rare beauty which she was herself conscious of possessing.

Mrs. Hazelhurst had seen a shade or two more of sadness in Helen's face after this alteration of plans; but Helen had not been looking well lately. She was silent, pale, and depressed; the bright smiles and glowing cheeks, which were the chief characteristics of her loveliness, were gone. Of her it might almost have been said that she was "faded."

"No wonder," said Mrs. Hazelhurst to herself, angrily, "to be thrown over after all—a girl who has evidently refused all offers on his account; and then he comes back and is as besotted as ever."

If the days of witchcraft had not long been past and gone, Mrs. Hazelhurst would quite readily have fallen a victim to a dominant superstition, and have declared that sorcery must be at the bottom of such a delusion; and who can tell whither such a belief might not have led her, with the pale cheeks of her daughter always before her, and her heart-rooted conviction that her nephew was being sacrificed;—for persecutors have not been necessarily more cruel than other people. They have merely been possessed of a narrower mental vision, and

have, therefore, not been able to arrive at any other conclusions than those which were determined by that limited range, blundering in their judgments because they took not fast hold of the raiment of Love as their guide.

Surely all persecution is but the intensifying our opinions into actions, and it may even be possible that the most earnest souls are therefrom in the more imminent danger of succumbing to the temptation of employing force as an auxiliary, when mild persuasion fails.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, however, could only wonder at Herbert's delusion without being able to solve it by any other method than by the usual belief so very widely spread among men and women, that there is no accounting for any absurdity into which a man may not fall in love matters. Feeling thus, Mrs. Hazelhurst had not acceded to the proposition of the Vicar's wife that Helen should go to the wedding of her former governess under the escort of herself and husband. Helen, indeed, although much wishing it, had not urged it strongly. She was in all things a good and obedient daughter, and never

asserted herself, or possibly Mrs. Hazelhurst would not have withheld her consent. So, instead of aunt or cousin being present at the marriage of Herbert with Miss Myles, they only sent presents and congratulations through Mrs. Ashcroft. The Vicar had posted a copy of *The Chippenham Gazette* to Mrs. Hazelhurst, which she had read in silence; nor had she offered it to Helen, but laid it on one side in such a manner that her daughter, supposing that her mother did not care for her to see it, did not put out her hand to take it for herself.

"How pale the dear girl is looking this morning," thought the mother; "I wish Herbert had not called at all; she was well enough before that."

But Mrs. Hazelhurst quite overlooked the fact that another frequent visitor at her house for the last two or three years was no longer able to be there so often, and that since Reginald Ashcroft had been made the Rector of Moreton, which was quite a hundred miles distant from Sunnyside, it was no more possible for him to give to Mrs. Hazelhurst and her daughter the benefit of his ever-cheery society as before.

Mrs. Hazelhurst had remarked that morning what a loss it was to them all that Reginald was so far off, adding —

"When he was Curate at Ashtonbury we saw so much of him."

"Yes," said Helen, coldly, and looked in an absent way through the window, but as Mrs. Ashcroft was at that moment announced she immediately brightened up, and ran forward almost gaily to welcome her.

Mrs. Ashcroft was not of an enthusiastic nature, nor much gifted with eloquence, but she was natural, and devoid of all sentiment and affectation. The real admiration and sincere affection which she had always entertained for Miss Myles being no longer restrained in its expression before Mrs Hazelhurst (the lovers being now man and wife and everything irrevocably settled as far as regarded them), she felt herself at liberty to say exactly what she thought, and consequently she launched forth almost volubly into encomiums on the bride, and on the Rector of St. Mary's and his girls ; and also gave an animated and almost vivid description of the breakfast at the Rectory. Mrs. Ashcroft seldom left home ; it was, therefore, quite a

new experience to be the lady paramount at such a house as Mr. Brereton's, and upon such an occasion.

Helen listened with rapt attention. She broke in with at last —

"Oh, dear! I must never repeat the offensive word Polly any more. Herbert did not like it years ago, I remember; but it is so difficult to call my once dear Polly, Mrs Langridge."

"Very," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, drily.

"I suppose there were some speeches," said Helen, colouring, it would appear, in consequence of her mother's monosyllable.

"Only Mr. Ashcroft made anything that was worthy to be called a speech. Mr. Brereton's was more like a sermon or a blessing. It certainly was not a speech. But you know how very witty and clever Mr. Ashcroft is," said the admiring wife, "and what good things he can say when required."

"Can you remember any of the good things?" asked Helen, smiling.

"Well, I have cause to remember one, because the lady who sat next to me was a little deaf, and did not see the point. You know how apt Mr. Ashcroft is in his quota-

tions, and of course you know, also, how very beautiful he always thought our friend. He once heard how much she had been admired down at Girton, and how crazy the undergraduates were about her; or, as Mr. Ashcroft had said, 'She made sad havoc with them all round.' So all this knowledge of Miss Myles's many conquests was brought by my husband into his speech very cleverly, without seeming, you know, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst, as if it had been at all premeditated. I thought it was so well done when he said, 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' I don't know whether everyone saw the point. The Rector looked abstracted, and as far away as if he had been at the gate of Heaven, and gazed at my husband in the most lost kind of manner. I think your nephew understood it, for he looked steadily with a half-smile at his bride, but she was immovably composed, as if she, too, was leaning over 'the golden bar,' as her own favourite poem says. But the poor lady near me, the wife of the Treasurer of the Marygold Guild, who had only heard about some 'thousands' of 'slain,' leant forward to me and asked in a half-whisper if I could tell

her where the great battle had been. Was it not good?" and Mrs. Ashcroft's beaming face was still more illumined than before at the recollections of her husband's opportune wit.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, however, did not smile. What was all this talk about conquests and admiration? In her mind she was "careworn" and "faded." She had asseverated these words so often to herself that she firmly believed them. How weak all these people were! As to Mr. Ashcroft, she had had too often experience of the inaptitude of his wit, and his similes, and his quotations to heed them now as being at all worth anything; and at this juncture, being in a more severe mood than usual, she highly deprecated his employment of Biblical quotations, however metaphorically used, upon such an occasion as the much-to-be-deplored marriage of her nephew to her ex-governess, and therefore looked very grave and was silent.

"I suppose they will not leave England without calling?" she asked, coldly.

"No, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst, they will be here in a few days. It is like Mrs. Langridge that their first visit will be to the grave of her husband's mother, to place wreaths

there together, then they will come on here; but Mr. Ashcroft and myself shall make a point of going down to Southampton a few days before they sail in order to see them off."

"You have not said anything about Herbert himself," said Mrs. Hazelhurst. "Did he look happier? It grieved me to see him, poor fellow."

"He does not need anyone's pity," replied Mrs. Ashcroft, drawing herself up; "my husband will tell you all about it, for he says the grandest thing he ever saw was the way the two men, Mr. Langridge, and Mr. Brereton the Rector, both fine-looking men, stood with their hands clasped in each other's; each of them, as far as I can understand, thanking and blessing the other, with tears in their eyes; the one for having been her protector in the past, the other in that he had been chosen by Providence as her guardian in the future, 'the great gift of God,' I think those were the words, or something like them, but Mr. Ashcroft will tell you."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, in a low voice.

A week later, having knelt together at the

mother's grave, the husband and wife drove over to Sunnyside. Leaving the carriage to wait at the entrance of the woody glades skirting the grounds, Herbert lifted his wife over the ha-ha fence, which he had himself about ten years before sprung over, gaily whistling.

"Come, Mary, we must go to the shrine of my hamadryad. Albeit 'tis now a deserted shrine, and the poor lone tree is no longer her home or her prison. I verily believe," he said, half smiling, half serious, "that you were a hamadryad in some former state of existence. I am quite sure of it; perhaps after all I released you. Who but a hamadryad or some other sylvan goddess ever possessed two such—"

"Hush!" was the laughing answer, and a gloved hand was laid upon his lips.

"My fair hamadryad," he cried, when free speech was restored, "had always a little of the prude in her."

"She is certainly a very elegant woman. I have no hesitation in saying that," was Mrs. Hazelhurst's remark to Helen after her nephew and his wife had left; kind Mrs.

Hazelhurst felt her heart relieved from a burden which had long oppressed it. She had sometimes argued with herself that perhaps she was unjust in her estimate of Miss Myles. She was therefore more content in her innermost soul after this little tribute of appreciation. She even took pleasure in conversing with her daughter upon the exquisite taste her niece (for she actually brought herself to speak openly of such a relationship) had in dress, but an additional cause of her cheerfulness was due to her lately awakened perception, so welcome to her maternal eyes, that Helen was certainly in no wise jealous of the preference given by her cousin to the lady who was now his wife.

Why was it, then, that Helen soon retired to her own room, and throwing herself on a couch, buried her face in the cushions and wept bitterly? She, who had so often been eloquent on the debated subject of Miss Myles's beauty with her mother, had been silent on this occasion, whilst her mother was recapitulating the claims of her newly-found niece to the admiration of everybody. This contrariety has been noticed before.

"Yes, she is beautiful, strangely beautiful," said Helen, after the tears had fallen long and silently. "She is like those women one reads of sometimes who through a long life, have always subjugated men; and she is pure, therefore has she the greater power. What hope that the hold once obtained by her over any man's affections could ever be relaxed! It is like an old world story. Ten years! A lifetime, almost, to some, and no change—a love that will go on for ever! Who would not exult at being loved with a love so broad and deep? But such a love is not for me! And my mother could think that I have thought upon Herbert all these years; that he won my affections when I was but a child, and has no perception of the truth! How much better, so that I am able to mask the reality to her, lest in her affectionate anxiety she might betray me. The marygolds which I sent to my cousin so long ago, the marygolds out of her garden which he had forgotten in his grief at parting, he has them still he told me but an hour since. A dead flower more prized by one man than a whole heart's love is cared for by another! For fourteen years! for

fourteen years!" she sighed, after a pause, "and she loved him well, how well is perhaps alone known to me, until Herbert came, but he—but he is faithful even now, and loves her still. Who can wonder at it? Who would pause to choose between her and me — although I am ten years younger, and am an heiress, as they call me, forsooth, as well!" A scornful curl of the lip showed at what rate the good girl valued the wealth with which she was accredited.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, full of generous impulses, and anxious to unbosom herself by openly expressing them, drove out with Helen the day following upon this, to make sundry calls, which she said had been too long unrepaid, but really to talk over the singular and unparalleled constancy of her nephew.

She had been reticent enough heretofore, and "the romantic tale" upon which she now dilated had never been heard of from her, whilst there was any chance of its being relegated to the region of myths.

Now, however, that her nephew's wife was an acknowledged member of her family, it behoved her, as she thought, to make the

fact as widely known as possible. Wherever they went that afternoon Helen was doomed to hear the same praises and the same descriptions; and the honest girl wondered both at her mother and at herself. She marvelled at Mrs. Hazelhurst's sudden conversion and change of language, for whereas for many weeks—ever since Herbert Langridge had first called and asserted that his determination and his feelings regarding the former object of his affections were quite unchanged—Helen had heard with an undescribable sense of weariness the unmeasured scorn of her mother towards her nephew and the object of his choice; and she was also now surprised at herself, because she was now almost equally as weary at hearing their praises. A feeling of shame oppressed her as she became conscious of a certain bitterness of heart—a void—whilst so many encomiums were showered upon another.

"We will just call in for a few minutes at the Ashcrofts, love. They will be glad to hear about Herbert and his wife."

"You forget, dearest mother, that it was

their intention to call at the Vicarage after leaving here ?"

"Ah, yes, but it had quite slipped my memory; nevertheless, we will drive round there. We will not stay. We may hear something about Reginald. You know that he is also a great favourite of mine; but how pale you look, child! Perhaps it has already been too much for you; if so, we will return immediately."

"Oh, no, mother! I always like to go to the Vicarage."

But the weary look came again over her face at hearing the same recital.

"Am I getting envious?" she asked, between her closed teeth.

"Only think of ten years' constancy on a man's side!" reiterated Mrs. Hazelhurst; "it is, I should think, quite unparalleled, as I am often saying to myself."

"It is not so much as fourteen years," said Helen, gloomily.

"Have you ever heard of anyone whose constancy has lasted fourteen years, Helen?" asked Mrs. Ashcroft.

"Yes," answered Helen, laconically.

"Why, who is that, love?" said Mrs. Hazelhurst, with eyebrows raised and in sheer amazement, lifting her eye-glass as she turned to her daughter.

But Helen's eyes were obstinately cast down and her lips compressed, and that was her only answer.

"Helen is not well; she is out of health, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst," whispered Mrs. Ashcroft at parting. "Let her go down to Southampton with us the day after to-morrow."

And Mrs. Hazelhurst, after a long and searching look at her daughter, nodded a smiling assent.

CHAPTER XII.

And ther sayde oones a clerk. What is better than gold? Jasper. And what is better than Jasper? Wisedom. And what is better than wisedom? A good womman. And what is better than a good womman? Nothing.

CHAUCER.

MAN is a talking animal; and what is better than good talk?—who would not go far to find it? In this respect it may be assumed that men have a greater advantage than women, for from their college to their club days the facilities for conversation are frequent. Facilities for conversation; but how rare amidst all this wealth of opportunity is really good talk met with! To have good talk there must be good talkers. And are all these canterers hurling their light shafts at random—these reproducers of the railleries of the press—talkers at all? This love of rail-

lery which is so rampant amongst young men especially, strangles conversation. The very pretence at excess of life visible in all this punning and counterfeiting of sprightliness, this retailing of grotesque stories, imposes silence upon him who has anything to say. Not but that a good humoured raillery, with some spice of wit accompanying, is a pleasant adjunct in discourse when the combatants are equally matched, but even then it is better only to be called forth occasionally as an auxiliary, and, like auxiliaries, generally requires to be under the stern control of the regular forces. For what greater bore is there in the large family of boredom than the man who gives himself up to habitual raillery ?

Now Sir Henry Mason was one who had always through life indulged in it, but as his flights were generally as destitute of wit as they were harmless, he was tolerated universally, for mankind in the aggregate bears its afflictions with tolerable equanimity, and the usual way in which "one of Mason's" was received was all included in the commentary "he's a good fellow." Being thoroughly good-natured and impervious to snubbing,

he persevered in giving forth his sallies year after year, and his old associates whom he habitually met at his club heard the oft-repeated jokes in silence, no longer even troubling themselves to notice them except by an occasional furtive smile exchanged, with sometimes an imperceptible shrug.

Their forbearance was partly due to a feeling that it was a necessity in the man to have this kind of safety-valve, although he had arrived at an age when raillery is less tolerated than it is with younger men; for it was generally widely known that only at his club was such delectation possible.

Sir Henry Mason was a married man, and Lady Mason condemned the least approaches to anything that savoured of levity. A ponderous woman was Lady Mason, both in mind and body, slow in speech, and slow in gait, with a mortal antipathy to the least approach to a joke. How the glib retailer of stale puns, and a woman who characterized laughter generally as the "crackling of thorns" drifted into the married state was a never-to-be-explained marvel. Lady Mason rejoiced in wearing continually the heavy chains of a dull decorum which never relaxed.

It was always to her an inward source of extreme satisfaction, when she remembered how effectually she had at an early stage of their married life corrected those weaknesses of her husband, who never now committed himself to foolish jesting. She reflected with pride upon the judgment which she had used in weeding out from their visiting list all those friends of his bachelorhood who were given to sing comic songs, or repeat sayings from the last *Punch*.

The return to England of that old friend who had years ago been the pole of attraction for his rallying propensities, seemed to awaken from their slumbering depths all the old frivolities which Lady Mason had once told him were unbefitting the demeanour of a Christian gentleman. Once he asked Sir Robert Hanbury to dinner, once, and once only.

The severe look of astonished reprobation and scarcely suppressed indignation with which Lady Mason fixed Sir Robert at his first "By Jove!" was only surpassed by the majestic silent arraignment of her husband by leaning back in her chair and crossing her hands in grand resignation, as he, fortified by

Sir Robert's presence, seized the opportunity, and gave vent to a very small witticism. Lady Mason that same night in the privacy of the nuptial chamber, and in a voice as if she were reading a homily, quoted the objurgation of Henry the Fifth to Falstaff as applicable to their late guest —

> "I know thee not, old man: Fall to thy prayers;
> How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!"

Quite innocent of the manner in which he had been thus apostrophized, Sir Robert, the very next time that he met his friend at the club, came down heavily upon the table with the offending fist, accompanied by the sonorous "By Jove!" as a preface to his very decided summary upon Lady Mason. "I can't stand your wife, Mason; she's more formidable than a fifty-pounder."

So the friends met at the Anglo-Indian Club and were unembarrassed and happy. Sir Robert let his old friend have a free field for his raillery, and the latter availed himself of his friend's frankness, as it afforded scope for his *wit*, and inwardly chuckled over and over again when in the grave solemnity of his home, by recalling his clever and sparkling hits at divers times on the sub-

ject of cherries and cherry pies, all of which Sir Robert took with never failing good humour.

Two or three days after Christmas the friends were again in the coffee-room, and on account of that festive time which generally draws men more to home-life than any other season of the year it was almost empty. They had each been reading their favourite papers with flying commentaries on the leaders, when Sir Henry drew one from his pocket, a county newspaper, which had evidently come that morning by post, and had not been as yet looked at.

"*The Chippenham Gazette*," he said, as he stripped off the wrapper. "That's where your little girl of the cherry pie went to, you know. There's a fellow whom I know down there who sends me a paper now and then; but there's not much in it besides local news."

His friend was deep in a speech of one of the members upon the situation in the East, and did not hear or heed this remark.

"I say, Hanbury!" he shouted, when his eyes had for a few moments glided carelessly over its contents, "Hanbury!"

"Whatever is the matter, man?" said the Colonel, looking up from his own paper; "anything amiss with Lady Mason this morning, eh?"

"Pshaw! look here! Read it for yourself. First column, at the top there," and he pushed *The Chippenham Gazette* across the table.

"No, no, not I; I don't want to lose my place here. Whatever you've found that you want me to hear, read it yourself, there's a good fellow! I suppose 'tis not very long. I'll listen for five minutes good."

"You'll listen fast enough when I begin, I've no doubt; but don't come in this time with your 'By Jove,' or I shall just slip the paper into my pocket again. Now for it: 'Picturesque Wedding at Chippenham.—All Chippenham and its adjoinings were in the highest state of excitement yesterday from early morn till night on account of the marriage of Miss Myles, the Lady Principal of the Chippenham Collegiate School.

"No sooner was it generally known that this lady, who has been among us for several years, and who has been so universally esteemed by all classes for her goodness

and sweetness of character, as well as admired for her beauty and her many and varied attainments, was to be married this morning at the Church of St. Mary's, than a large concourse of people of both sexes and of all ages thronged to the vicinity of the church.

"The bridegroom's status as holding a high position in India had somehow oozed out, as well as the long period of his and Miss Myles's engagement, and these topics were discussed by the patient groups awaiting the arrival of the bride. The dress of the bride was a departure from that usually adopted, and, possibly because she is not in her first youth, the veil and wreath was replaced by the form of bonnet called the 'Princess,' and her entire costume upon so cold and wintry a day was more pleasing to the eye than any glistening white satin or veil, suggestive of chilliness, would have been. To be brief, her gown was of a rich dark blue velvet, trimmed with ermine, with a long train of the same, also lined and bordered with ermine, and the bonnet was of the same material, with a small aigrette of diamonds in front. She also wore around her throat a rare necklet of diamonds, in antique setting,

which relieved the colour of the gown. A rich, short Chantilly veil completed her costume, the whole of which was singularly in accordance with her style of beauty. Her only two bridesmaids, the two daughters of Mr. Brereton, the Rector, who officiated, were also warmly clothed in cream-coloured plush, turned up with blue, with hats to correspond.

"Miss Myles had long been the patroness, as she was also the foundress, of a guild for girls and young women, well known in Chippenham as the 'Marygold Guild,' the marygold being a favourite flower with this lady. These girls, to the number of almost two hundred, in their uniforms of blue serge, with the marygold device worked with silk in its own colour on cuffs and collar, were ranged in a triple row on each side of the churchyard path leading to the porch, and upon the bride's alighting at the outer gate received her with an adaptation of Keble's marriage hymn, arranged expressly for the occasion. The effect of their well-trained voices, and the severe simplicity of the composition, appealed strongly to the assembled crowd, and many tears were shed by the

sympathetic feminine portion of the by-standers, who had very good reasons; realizing how great would be their loss when the graceful 'Lady of the Marygolds,' as she was familiarly called by them, was abstracted from their midst.

"We must not forget to note that many of these girls carried baskets of yellow flowers, and as the garden marygolds were not procurable, the yellow marguerites, grown under glass, did duty for the bride's favourite flower, and these they cast before the happy couple as they left the church.

"Mr. and Mrs. Langridge will shortly leave for India, and after a few excursions to various friends are expected to go to Southampton, whence they sail."

The reader paused, laid the paper down, and looked at the Colonel with a smile, who had, indeed, listened in silence, and without interrupting this perusal.

"I say, Hanbury, this Mr. Langridge had some of the cherry pie, I expect, eh?"

"Be quiet, Mason, and just hand me over the paper; I want to look at it myself."

"Oh, it's all there! Don't be suspicious, Hanbury; I'm not playing any joke upon you

now, and you've lost your chance, even at the eleventh hour."

"Give it over, I say, and don't be a fool, Mason!"

"There, there, my good fellow," cried his friend, laughing, as he pushed *The Chippenham Gazette* across the table; "the lawyer has won by more than a neck this time."

Colonel Hanbury took up the paper gravely, and half turning his back to his friend, so as to face the fire, he very slowly and carefully, as it seemed, went over the whole details, often stopping to consider, and then, with a kind of nod of affirmation, continuing his reading. When he came to the close he folded it up with much precision, and instead of returning it to his friend proceeded to put it into his own pocket.

"So you are intending to appropriate it, are you, Colonel? Have you not fully mastered the contents? The cherry pie drama is concluded, I conceive, at last."

"Confound the cherry pie!" said Colonel Hanbury, gruffly.

"Amen, say I, if it were leathery and indigestible."

"Look here, Mason, be sensible, if you

can, in the absence of your commanding officer. But, joking apart, this must be a wonderful woman. It wouldn't have been much of a mistake, you see, on my part. She must be well conserved; they speak of her beauty as something remarkable."

"'Tis no use bemoaning spilt milk, my friend; the astute lawyer has won."

"An ill-conditioned fellow!" grunted out Sir Robert; "I should think he'd be as sour as verjuice to live with."

"Why, what the deuce can you know about him?"

"What can I know? Why, only just this much: that I did not find him a very lively or companionable fellow-traveller. Why, you've seen him, Mason; don't you remember the fellow who bowed to me that morning—the first morning we met, you know—in this very room? I told you then he came over with me. By Jove!"

"A handsome, striking-looking man, if I remember aright," said Sir Henry, maliciously, "and in the prime of life."

"Oh, I've nothing to say against his looks, nor him in the abstract, except that he seems to have a disagreeable temper of his own.

He's thought a great deal of over there, an indefatigable servant, and all that kind of thing—a rising man—perhaps I ought to say a risen man, because he's got to the top at railway speed, so to speak, but I found him as a fellow-passenger silent and unsociable."

"He was in love, you see, Colonel."

"Nonsense; a man can't be in love for ten years straight off."

"Whew! I fancied a certain elderly Colonel had been wearing the willow for double that time."

"I look like it, don't I?" replied the Colonel, jumping up, and, drawing back his head, he gave his grey moustache a twirl; "but I'll keep this paper, if you don't mind. It's rather amusing to me to see how this has all come round. I never thought I should hear anything of that woman again, and here it's just like the last act of a play."

"As I just said, 'a cherry pie drama,' Hanbury."

"What do you say, Mason, to running down to Southampton with me for a few days? I've just a little curiosity to see what kind of woman the curly-haired girl has turned into."

"Oh, I could not go, my dear Colonel."

"Could not get permission, I suppose, from your commanding officer, eh? Well, thank God I'm not in that case. I own no superior officer, I'm glad to say," and slapping his friend on the shoulder he laughed heartily, and bade him good-morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

Considereth eek, how that the harde stoon
Under oure foot, on which we tread and goon.
Yit wasteth it, as it lith by the weye.
The brode river some tyme wexeth dreye.
The grete tounes see we wane and wende,
Than may I see that all thing hath an ende.

CHAUCER.

"WHEN you have finished your letter, Mary, we will go forth into the sunshine. After the late dull skies it is really life-giving to look out on such a morning as this. To whom are you writing so lengthy an epistle?"

"To Margaret Brereton. I promised her father that I would be a frequent correspondent with her. He is thinking of removing her from school and superintending her studies himself."

"I see your counsel in that—it will be a good thing for them both," answered Her-

bert, reflectively, as he gazed from the window of their hotel on to the sparkling ripples of Southampton Water. "Both father and daughter are—"

He stopped abruptly, leaving his sentence unfinished, and, going up to the writing table, laid a gentle hand on his wife's shoulder.

"When do you think the Ashcrofts will be down, Mary?"

"Perhaps to-day, for we have now only three days before us, Herbert."

"I should have liked to see Reginald before leaving. He was an old chum of mine in childhood, when I stayed at Sunnyside with my aunt, but I suppose he had reasons of his own for not coming to our wedding."

His wife made no remark upon this observation, but said, parenthetically —

"I think that we left nothing undone, the omission of which would have caused us after regret. I am so glad that we went together and laid flowers on dear Dr. Grantham's grave. That was your thought," and Mary looked into his face with a grateful smile.

"Yes, I am very glad. But we have missed Reginald, and besides being my playfellow he was also your pupil."

Mary looked back again upon the letter she was folding.

The "astute lawyer," sitting down by her side, took up the hand next to him, and, kissing it, said, softly —

"Was that poor fellow in for it too? Was it he who called you 'his Amy?'"

Her eyes were raised immediately, and steadily confronted the searching but not unloving glance of the husband.

"My pupil call me 'his Amy!'" she said. "I have never been called 'Amy' except by one—it was merely a pet-name."

"So, I suppose, the synonym of 'my glorious girl.' Now, tell me, who was that privileged one who dared to write thus to my hamadryad?—a boy's flight, evidently."

Herbert, as he said these words, touched the hand which he firmly held with his lips. His wife, whose eyelids had never drooped before his gaze, answered quietly and with a half-amused smile —

"Those words, dear Herbert, seem to have burnt themselves into your brain as deeply as they are imbedded in my own heart. They are very sweet words to me. You quoted them once before, quite unconscious of what

you were saying. They are from a letter of my mother's which I always keep in my Rossetti, a gift from her accompanying it."

"Why, Mary, I am a convicted villain! Can you forgive me?"

"I am your Amy. You have made those loved words your own," she cried.

Mrs. Langridge was just drawing on her gloves when she observed, carelessly —

"This morning appears to exercise a potent charm over that military-looking man on the esplanade below. He has been on duty there for at least two hours—long before I began my letter. I think I observed him before we began our breakfast. He, too, must be revelling in this unaccustomed sunshine."

Mr. Langridge took up his glass. After a long survey he said, as he laid it down —

"He has the contour and look of one of my fellow-passengers in the *Guatemala*. I am very much surprised to see him here. He cannot, however, be intending to return to India, as he was out there twenty years at one stretch, and is now on the retired list. I cannot think of his name just now, but if it be he, he is a colonel, a baronet, a K.C.B.,

decidedly soldierly in appearance, but very noisy. Are you ready, darling?"

Our friend Sir Robert Hanbury had, in truth, with military precision, been on duty since nine o'clock. He had arrived at Southampton the night before, and having learnt from the list of visitors in the paper at which hotel Mr. and Mrs. Langridge were staying he had taken up his post of reconnoitring at that very early hour.

"She will not recognize me," he had said, "and as for her husband, he will be too much engaged."

He saw them at once, therefore, as they descended the steps of the hotel to cross over to the esplanade. He gave one rapid glance at the lady with as keen and criticizing a look as if he had been at an inspection, and the result, to judge from a sharp little nod as he walked on, was entirely satisfactory.

"No shawls and tagrags of wraps hanging about. Just what it ought to be. Women do make themselves such guys. There's not one in a thousand could pass muster were I their inspector. She's all right so far," he soliloquized, and the Colonel strode quickly in the same direction, but

walking well ahead of the couple, with the double view of keeping up his circulation, and with giving himself, by reaching the end of the esplanade quickly, an opportunity of meeting them face to face on his return march without there being anything conspicuous in his proceedings.

He was in consequence some thirty or forty yards in advance of Mr. and Mrs. Langridge by the time they were following on his footsteps; and as at this hour the esplanade was filling with strollers eager to get their constitutionals before the noontide sun began to decline—Mary and her husband being in close converse, they did not observe that the subject of the few minutes' conversation as recorded above was near them, until, the end of the promenade being reached, he had turned round and was resuming less hurriedly his march back.

"Yes, it is the same," said Herbert, suddenly, "my fellow-passenger in the *Guatemala* I mean, and his name has just come to me—Colonel Hanbury!—Sir Robert Hanbury! How oddly names that are forgotten come back when you are least searching for them! Yes, to be sure—Sir Robert Hanbury!"

"Colonel Hanbury!" cried his wife.

"Yes, dear. Do you know anything of him?"

"An old friend of my father's," and Mrs. Langridge pressed her husband's arm.

The Colonel, as he came up to them, directed his looks more to the lady than to his fellow-traveller, upon whose arm she hung, and it almost seemed as if he were about to pass without recognition had not Herbert's raised hat compelled him to a hasty acknowledgment. Mary again pressed her husband's arm.

"If you do not mind, Herbert, I should like to speak to Colonel Hanbury. He knew my father and mother so well."

Before these words had hardly passed her lips Herbert had turned, and, again raising his hat, laid a hand upon Colonel Hanbury's arm.

"Pardon me, Sir Robert, but my wife would like to be introduced to you; but introduction seems almost superfluous, as she claims you for an old acquaintance."

An angry look at first gleamed from under his shaggy eyebrows; but it was transient, like all the Colonel's outbursts of fierceness.

"Mrs. Langridge does me too much honour," he said, courteously, if somewhat coldly. "It is nevertheless true that I had the pleasure of knowing her father—a gallant officer—and her mother, and also Miss Myles, but it is twenty years ago—twenty years ago!"

"One must hardly speak of twenty years of remembrance where a lady is concerned," said Herbert, smiling; and seeing that Sir Robert stood, nor made any attempt to advance to Mrs. Langridge, he added, "but anyhow you see that you are not forgotten, Colonel Hanbury, even with such a formidable reminder intervening."

"Not forgotten!" ejaculated the Colonel, sternly. "Not forgotten!"

"How could my father's comrade and my mother's good friend be forgotten by their daughter, Colonel Hanbury?" said a gentle voice, and Mary, who had heard the raised accents of those two words, came to his side and held out her hand.

The Colonel took the proffered hand and held it for some moments, while he seemed to be gravely perusing her face, too intently, indeed, for even Mary's composure and self-con-

trol, for it called an unwelcome blush to her face which gave it an added beauty, and a touch of girlhood.

"Your husband," he at last said, "very properly just now called me to task for my being so strict an observer of dates. I am a martinet on that point; but looking at you, Mrs. Langridge, I should forget it. Ah! when last we met you were a little girl in frocks and were gathering cherries. Am I not right?"

"Quite right, Colonel Hanbury," and a deeper glow overspread her brow; "but I was not exactly a little girl in frocks."

"No, no—no, no—it's not fair," said the Colonel, and a kindly smile illumined his rugged face as he began to shake the little hand he held with great fervour and energy; "it's not fair." But the homely and cherished recollection was too much for him. "I never had any of that cherry pie after all," he added, and with a short, good-natured laugh and another shake he released the hand.

"Will you come to our hotel this evening and dine with us, Colonel Hanbury, just for the sake of old times? Perhaps we shall be able to give you cherry pie."

"Made from bottled cherries! oh! The cherry pie I lost was made from cherries fresh off the tree, but not fresher nor brighter than the maiden who gathered them," and again he laughed. "But it's not fair. Forgive an old soldier, Mrs. Langridge, and allow me to congratulate you, and you also, Mr. Langridge; you are a very fortunate man, sir, a very fortunate man."

"But will you promise to give us the pleasure of your society to dinner, Sir Robert?" asked Herbert, as he warmly shook the Colonel's hand after this genial outburst.

Colonel Hanbury turned to Mrs. Langridge, who had not as yet echoed her husband's invitation.

"Yes, do come, Colonel Hanbury; we shall both be so glad."

"Our talk then, Mrs. Langridge, shall be only of the home to which you are going. I love India only second to England, and shall be happy to add my experiences to those of your husband if you need any commendations of the life obtainable there by sober, earnest folk, which may reconcile you to leaving England."

"Revelations upon revelations!" cried Herbert, gaily, as they resumed their walk. "Why, the Vicar seems to have been right after all. Mary, I've not seen you blush so vividly since the day you kissed me under the chestnuts! I have cause to be thankful to my dying day that the invincible soldier did not stop to eat your cherry pie."

"Do you think that it would have made any difference?" she answered, laughing. "But, Herbert, see who are coming yonder! our dear friends, the Ashcrofts, and oh! joy of joys! my Helen is with them!"

"My dear girl does not look herself," said Mary, as, having drawn her old pupil into her own room, she was herself helping to undo her wraps. Oh, my own Helen! this is, indeed, an unexpected joy! But why so pale, dear? Come, let us sit down and have five minutes' quiet chat. Mrs. Ashcroft will not be ready yet, and she knows the way to the drawing-room."

She led her to a settee by the fire, and, as they sat down, Mrs. Langridge again embraced and kissed her.

"Helen," she said, softly, as her arm encircled her waist, "there is one thing at my heart that I have longed to say to you, and I am thankful that you have given me this opportunity."

"To do what?" said her former pupil, finding that her friend, who had paused, was regarding her with wistful looks. "What do you wish to say to me?"

"I have reason to believe, from some observations dropped by Mrs. Ashcroft, darling, that Reginald Ashcroft loves you! Oh! Helen, think what happiness it would be to me if my two dear pupils could be united! I do not believe, dearest, that you are indifferent to him."

A faint colour tinted her cheek.

"I have known Reginald all my life, but I see no reason therefrom why you should wish to unite us, Mrs. Langridge, merely because we were both your pupils."

The cold, forced tone of this reply caused Mrs. Langridge to draw Miss Hazelhurst closer to her. She took one of her hands in hers.

"I love you both as if you were my brother and my sister. That love is a stronger one

than can be given to a pupil, however dear. I know of no better gift which as an elder sister I could bestow, if it were mine to give, than to give you to each other."

"Spoken right queenly, and like your very old self! But, Mrs. Langridge, Mr. Reginald Ashcroft has not himself asked for the hand that you are so ready to bestow."

"Not 'Mrs. Langridge' to you, Helen, but simply Mary, your cousin Mary, who abjures all queenly rights, and who only wishes to make two loved ones happy."

Helen looked up hastily.

"You have a right, cousin Mary, to speak of *two* loved ones. I never doubted your love for me, nor at one time at least your—"

"What?"

"Love for Reginald Ashcroft. See now" —and Helen's eyes flashed—"I am not—never was, and never shall be queen of hearts, as you are. But if I ever have one heart to rule over it must be mine, and mine only."

"My dearest Helen," said her cousin, "I am much pained. You are in a great error."

"No, no; I am in no error, and I love

you just the same. But I do know that Reginald Ashcroft loved you for years, and that before Herbert came on the scene you must have loved him!"

"*Must* have loved him? Helen!"

"I have seen you kiss his letters over and over again. 'Tis rather hard that you should carry off both my lovers. Confess, now, that it is, cousin," with an attempt to smile. "But 'tis of no consequence. I came to see you once more, darling old Polly; let us not waste our time about such useless talk," and she laid her head on Mrs. Langridge's shoulder.

"As you in some inscrutable way discovered Reginald's youthful attachment, I shall not deny its truth. Neither you nor any other person would ever have known it from me. It was not returned by myself, however, nor did I ever receive any love letter from my pupil. If you ever by accident saw me fondly kiss any letters, they were those of my dead mother. Helen, in what a labyrinth your thoughts have been wandering! Would you really out of pique let a man who truly loves you, and to whom you are not indifferent, as I see more clearly

every moment, be made unhappy? This is not like my generous, faithful Helen."

"Reginald has never told me that he cared for me."

"No, Helen; you are wealthy. Reginald would rather be assured that you really did care for him before he would seek the hand of one almost reputed to be an heiress. I verily believe from his character that if you were absolutely penniless rather than dowered as you are, he would not have gone to his Rectory without declaring himself."

"Forgive my proud petulance, dear cousin. Could I really believe that Reginald loved me well enough to make me his wife now, I could be happy. Had you ever loved him it would have been quite different. Of course, he could not help loving you—who could?" She put her arms round Mrs. Langridge's neck. "Everybody knows that you were the making of him. I understand it all now, I understand it all now; it was his love for you!"

"Love is a great teacher," answered Mary, solemnly; "but never speak of that again, dearest Helen. Both Herbert and myself want so much to see him before we

leave England. May I write to him to come and take a farewell of us for the sake of the old times?"

"But you will not say that I am here?"

"Yes, but I shall, or we should not get him, I fear. Have I permission? But no, I will not ask permission, I take the responsibility on myself. But what about your mother, Helen?"

"I think my mother will raise no objection; she is very fond of Reginald, but I almost wish I had not come."

"I shall not compromise you, darling, never fear; wait a moment, it is soon done. I will not write to your Reginald anything you may not like to read." And drawing some writing materials near her, Mrs. Langridge hastily wrote —

"DEAR REGINALD,

"Herbert says that he longs to see you before we leave England. I need not say that my own feelings also induce me to write to ask you to do us that favour. Your mother and father have kindly come, and have brought with them another dear old pupil of mine. Let me have the great delight to see both my much-loved pupils

here together. The happiness of both is very dear to me."

"There, Helen, there is nothing very improper in that, is there?"

"I had made up my mind that I would never marry him before I came down here," said Helen, with somewhat of a frown.

"And the roses of your cheeks had paled in consequence," answered Mrs. Langridge, and she sealed the letter and placed it with others destined for the post.

"You will say nothing, I hope, to Mrs. Ashcroft?" said Helen.

"No, nor to my own dear husband; my first deception," said Mary, laughing.

The dinner party that evening was bright and the conversation animated. Almost all were for the most part listeners, only throwing in enough of the talking element in the form of questions to prevent any stagnation. The Colonel seemed the happiest of the party, and a few half-hours daily with women so refined and intellectual would, even at that late hour of his life, have toned him down considerably. As it was, his voice was much more subdued than usual, and only once were

his own feelings shocked by the echoes of his sonorous "By Jove!" His own feelings were more shocked apparently than those of anyone else at the table, for smiles rather than frowns were the most perceptible expressions on every face except that of the offender, who turned fiery red, and was very nearly perpetrating a dozen other oaths in his stammering attempts to cover that one into which he had been betrayed. It was at rather a late hour when Colonel Hanbury rose to go.

"We shall see you to-morrow, I hope? You will join us again, Sir Robert?" asked Herbert, warmly.

"No, Mr. Langridge, to-morrow I go back to London. I go by an early train, but I shall carry with me a most enjoyable remembrance—it will last me. I have had a delightful evening. I came down, Mrs. Langridge," cried the honest old soldier, "expressly to try and get a look at you. I am not ashamed of it. No, by — Forgive me— no, I am not ashamed of it. I did not expect to speak to you, much less spend an evening with you. I am very much gratified. Good-bye; God bless you—God bless you both. Your father was a gallant officer, and your mother— well,

well, I knew them both. Good-bye, my dear, and again, God bless you."

The old soldier's eyes were glistening. Could they be really tears ?

"We shall come back in five years, Colonel," said Herbert Langridge; "we hope to meet all old friends again."

"Only five years!" echoed Mary, tremulously.

Tears are catching, for there was no mistake that they were shining in those grey eyes of hers, and even Helen looked as if in another moment her lashes would hold similar pendants.

"I am sixty-five," said Colonel Hanbury, almost fiercely; "a man cannot count on five years at that age, though it may be. Good-bye; don't come to the door, I'd rather not," he said, resolutely, and he went.

"I like that old soldier," said Herbert, breaking the general silence which had fallen upon them all; "I did him an injustice."

The young Rector of Moreton had just entered his library, where his breakfast was laid. It was a library by name rather than

reality, for a few books hardly constitute a right to any room to have so venerable a name affixed to it, but this room was intended for a library, and his predecessor really possessed sufficient books to warrant the assumption of the name; but Reginald Ashcroft was no book collector, and, notwithstanding his success, and the almost unexampled position which he had (certainly through interest in a great measure) attained, of a living at thirty-two, he could not by any possibility develop into a reader. His tastes were those of an ordinary country gentleman, upon which was grafted the clergyman. Such habits were more suitable to the society in which he found himself; to whom a studious man would have been abhorrent, and as every one of his tastes were moderate in degree, and held so lightly that it could be at any time laid down without a wrench, he was in all respects a man who would always be at peace with his flock, and his churchwardens in particular; as no innovations would unadvisedly creep in; and although from his love of neatness and decorum generally some improvements might be expected, yet not any susceptibilities on clerical

matters would be ruffled, as every change would be so very gradual as hardly to be perceived until it was thoroughly accepted. A moderate man in all things, but a persistent one, what he did this year at thirty-two he might be calculated upon as doing at sixty-four, if his fine constitution remained intact. Not a man, as we have seen, to break his heart for love, but one, nevertheless, who would hold on to his first love out of sheer tenacity, until, like the anemone when torn from its rock, he could no longer clutch to any foundation, but be cast absolutely adrift.

For six years he had held on to the possibility of making Mary Myles his wife when he was no longer the objectionable "boy" she seemed to think him, and when he really had something to offer. We have seen how this base, to which he had clung, was dug from under him. For the next four years, by the force of habit, he had steadily pursued the road to advancement, although latterly with no hope of sharing the end hoped for with the beloved one of his teens. He rather looked forward as one of the likeliest possibilities that he should drift (as

he had told his father) into a sleek bachelor rector, and never marry.

He liked agriculture moderately, but enough to take an intelligent interest in the land belonging to the Rectory. He liked sport, as it is called in irony, surely, of the sufferings it inflicts on the lower animals; but it was rather from the enjoyment of the fresh breezes and the open-air exercise it involved than from any pleasure he found in bagging game, for he was a humane man, into whose nature no fierceness could be stirred up or provoked; and another impulse was given to out-door exercises in that he was above all desirous to restrain within proper limits an indication that with a life of indolence he would develop fat.

These were the reasons that caused him to leave his bed at least two hours before the townsman expects to be called; and as he was punctual, and his habits were, as we have seen, early, it was at eight o'clock, after some miles had been gone over in coursing, riding, or shooting that the Rector of Moreton sat down to his solitary, simple breakfast in his library, where the shelves would have been almost bare had not all papers and periodicals

been ranged on them methodically, and so helped to cover up some spaces which would otherwise have been empty. The other rooms were too large; the house had been built with a view to the accommodation of the usually large families appertaining to the clergy as a rule, and this library was the smallest and cosiest room for the usual resort of a single man.

The clock in the hall was pointing to five minutes to eight as the Rector, ruddier with a deeper and browner red than heretofore, took off his shooting jacket and gaiters.

"Any letters?"

"One, sir, which lies on the breakfast table."

With placid face Reginald walked into the library. He did not at once hasten to seize the letter lying on his plate, but went and stood before the fire in the attitude most loved by men, but there was none other in the room from whom his well-developed form would have blocked out the cheerful flame, and so far he was in his right.

He looked out for a few minutes on to his well-kept lawn; a few blackbirds, thrushes,

and starlings were having the breakfast he always ordered for them.

"I think we shall have a severe winter after all, Hale; according to the old proverb, 'when the days lengthen, the cold will strengthen.' I shall get you to hang up some more bones of meat in the shrubberies; I see the others are picked almost bare," and then his thoughts went back to Sunnyside, and his father's home, where tom-tits abounded, and from tom-tits his mind by a natural enough course went to Helen Hazelhurst. How charming it would be to see Helen on that lawn as the spring days returned, in her pretty costumes, culling some flowers for the breakfast table; but he shook his head as if so preposterous an idea ought to be and could be shaken off at a moment's notice, and turned to the table, where, his eye falling upon the aforenamed letter, he quite leisurely stretched out his hand, and, as was his wont, looked at superscription and postmark before opening it. What great study did it require to decipher the Southampton postmark, and what was there so enigmatical in that beautifully and clearly written direction? Whatever it was

Reginald Ashcroft made no haste to see the contents, but looked fixedly at its exterior only, and with an expression seldom seen on his usually placid countenance. What power, however, even the superscription on a letter without reference to the contents can have upon us, must be known to all who take up in their hands the faded time yellowed contents of their bureau, where letters of some twenty years lie in their cells, tied up in their severally assorted bundles. With such a look as the faces of such exhibit when their fingers touch one, which is like a telegraphic message from the depths of buried years, and sends an electric current through every nerve, so in a minor degree and in accordance with his character was the countenance of the young Rector changed and the more delicate fibres of his feelings shaken. What now! he had been asked by his old friend Herbert to the wedding, but Herbert knew nothing of his early love, or he would not have asked anything so preposterous. His mother had pressed him to accompany them, and could not understand his refusal; but she knew nothing also ; his father, however, although he felt convinced that his

son had quite conquered a hopeless passion, yet fully comprehended the situation, and said quietly—"Of course not, my dear boy; who could under the like circumstances?" but here was a letter in Mary's own hand. What would he have given formerly to have seen such a one on his breakfast table! But none ever came. Yes, one had come, but its taste was as bitter as gall to the youth who was longing for some sweet medicine for his ills. And here was one from the lady who had married his friend after ten years' engagement. Their constancy had outlived his own, they deserved to be happy; and as his thoughts became modified by this suggestion, he slowly opened it, and very carefully considered its contents, which were not difficult to be mastered. "Going away to India; his old friend Herbert." There were two strong motives, and the deterrent one was the meeting his old love as a married woman; but then came in the figure of Helen. What did Mrs. Langridge mean? Yes, there were some sweet reasons in what she said. Both had been her pupils, and she was going away. He owed her—why, yes, he owed to her this comfortable Rectory; he could not

have gone to her wedding, but now it was quite different; he ought to go to bid her farewell, and then, he should see Helen—not that he ever intended to marry, but still he should like to see Helen. It was one additional impetus to the scale, the balance declined, he would go, and go immediately.

Five hours afterwards, travelling by an express train, Reginald Ashcroft was deposited at Southampton. After a hasty refection, and some arrangements to his dress at the railway hotel, the young Rector hastened to make his call, but he had not proceeded far when he encountered his father in company with another gentleman whom only by the circumstance of such companionship he judged to be his former friend. The surprise of both at this meeting was so loudly expressed that Reginald at once understood that the letter of invitation which he had received that morning, and so promptly acted upon, was not a joint production, but emanated from Mrs. Langridge only. He consequently immediately restrained the allusion to it which was just about to escape from his lips as an explanation of his sudden arrival. The hearty

welcome, however, accorded to him by Herbert banished at once some rising scruples.

"Well, old fellow, better late than never. I should have been sorry not to have seen you. In fact, I had thought of running over by myself to your snuggery, only, you see, I have been married but a few days after all. Reginald, you are a witness to the truth that your path has been through pleasant pastures. You are two years older than I, and yet look at me."

"I suppose a lawyer's life is a very arduous one," said his friend, without contradicting the patent fact that Herbert Langridge at thirty had left the appearance of youth far behind him; "and you have mounted the ladder so quickly."

"You have not done amiss either, Rector," said Herbert smiling.

"I have had so many helps," said Reginald, quietly, and almost apologetically, "and some patronage besides; there is not much merit due to myself."

"The ladies are out shopping," said the father. "Joe Brunning has at last made up his mind to marry our Phebe, and has given

me notice to put up the banns; they will be read for the first time next Sunday. Marriage is infectious, I suppose; anyhow, the moment Joe knew that his patroness, the *serrafum*, had really entered the holy estate, it determined him. I verily believe, however, Herbert, that through that action of hers your wife has lost the seraphic position she formerly held in Joe's brain. I believe he conceives that to be a *serrafum* one must be in a state of celibacy. Extremes meet, and Joe Brunning and the Rector of St. Mary's seem here to be in accord."

Herbert Langridge had heard of Joe and his *serrafum* that morning. Reginald was well up in his father's favourite story, and both men smiled.

"So Mrs. Langridge has gone this morning with your mother and Miss Hazelhurst— ah, by-the-bye, she is here," said the Vicar, turning to his son, "to make purchases of suitable presents for the couple. If we go in the direction of the town perhaps we shall meet them, eh, Herbert? They were out early, and it is not far off our luncheon time."

How was it that in a few minutes Reginald Ashcroft found himself walking between the

lady of his boyhood's dreams and the girl for whom he was quite conscious of a nascent affection? Helen had turned red and pale alternately at the sudden meeting at the corner of a road, but she had smiled also. At meeting her perhaps Reginald would have reddened also if a stronger power in the presence of Mrs. Langridge had not put to flight such evidence of emotion. After a little while Helen, however, fell back and rejoined Mrs. Ashcroft, who was walking with her husband and Herbert. Then and then only, when he was conscious that there was a vacancy on his left side, did Reginald turn with something like a lively interest to see what had become of the handsome girl whose skirts had brushed him a few minutes since, and a deeper red did then dye his brow, seeing that she had left him to join his mother.

"Reginald," said Mary, in a low voice. Again recalled to that presence ever so potent for him, by the mere tone of her voice, he turned as hastily and inclined his head to Mrs. Langridge. "We are going away the day after to-morrow. I wrote to you of my own accord, because you know that I have always loved you as a younger brother. I want to

see your life put on its proper footing before we leave."

What a strange speech; what could she mean?

"It is time that you were married, Reginald."

The Rector felt the same momentary repulsion to be thus advised by Mrs. Langridge as Helen had done.

"Mrs. Langridge, I am the best judge of that. I have no thought of marrying."

"Do not be angry. From anyone else it would be an impertinence, but not from me. If you think a little while you will see that it is not an impertinence from me."

"Is there any necessity that I should marry, Mrs. Langridge?"

"Yes; otherwise you will sink into a self-indulgent, easy-going country rector, of whom there are already too many. You have not the gifts required of a real celibate."

"You are complimentary, Mrs. Langridge."

"It is true, and you know it."

There was silence. The young Rector whipped some pebbles away with his stick, as we once saw him strike at a hedge.

"You have always assumed a kind of

mentorship over me, Mrs. Langridge. I owe much to you, and I acknowledge it. What do you want of me now?"

"Follow the dictates of your heart."

"It was you who forbade me to follow them once."

"Follow them now; the past is gone."

"I have no doubt about your meaning, dear Mrs. Langridge. It is meant well. You have always meant well by me, and not me alone. But how can you, who have always scorned wealth, ask me to do this thing—you, of all people in the world."

"Because in this case wealth is an accident, and if it did not exist you would not have a shadow of excuse."

"Excuse!"

"Yes, excuse! You should not have been so frequent a visitor at Sunnyside, to begin with."

"I am not so conceited a fool as I was in my boyhood, Mrs. Langridge. You wrong me if you mete me by that measure."

"Mr. Langridge is about to join us," said Mary, glancing round. "You love Helen Hazelhurst, and your love is returned. You will lose all the place you have long held in

my heart as my first, my oldest pupil, if you allow any narrow sentiments to crush out feeling," and, turning round, Mary met her husband and linked her arm in his.

"Well, what have you bought for poor Joe?"

"Among other things, which were chiefly for Phebe, his bride, that which will gladden him exceedingly, as it will be a possession hitherto unattainable—a cuckoo clock. There was one in the housekeeper's room at Sunnyside, and it was told me once that Joe declared if that clock were his, he should think that he was in Paradise."

"In Paradise! I should rather feel myself somewhere else had I such a possession always near me," said Herbert, laughing.

"Ah! but poor Joe was devotedly fond of the song of the cuckoo. It was the one bird that made his eyes glisten to hear, and to hear the cuckoo all the year round, night and day. Oh! I think there is some poetry in poor Joe, uncouth though he is in appearance."

"Yes; there you are quite right. Joe had poetry and aspirations, but they were smothered like those of many another poor

fellow's higher feelings, and could not get beyond the germinating stage. I think it was you, Mary, who caused even that early process in growth, which was arrested when your presence was taken from him."

"When we are in India, Herbert, I must look out for some curiosity or ornament to send him direct. Anything coming from 'beyond seas,' as Joe would express it, would lift him to the seventh heaven."

"So be it. I have cause to remember Joe as well as you, dearest; it was he who guided me to your garden on the most eventful day of my life. But here we are at our hotel, and where are the others? Why, we are all in pairs, and have left them far behind, and Reginald and Cousin Helen are the last of all, and, I think, standing still. How fond that young Rector is of a stick; he seems to be pointing out something to his companion just in the manner that one sees in old engravings, where paterfamilias is endeavouring to awaken, by means of his stick, the consciousness of wife and children to something like an intelligent perception of landscape or some architectural beauties. Why are you laughing, Mary?"

"I do not know unless it is that I am so very happy."

Why is it that after childhood a confession of happiness is so seldom heard? Is it merely because it is not a durable possession? Suppose it be not, why should not its temporary visit be, therefore, acknowledged with thankfulness? A novelist much appreciated in his day has said that people always shrink from saying "How happy I am." Possibly, and so they shrink too often from the expression of every form of gratitude. Would that they would shrink rather from declarations of an opposite character, and spare their friends and relations the utterances of a whining discontent.

"Well, I don't know," proceeded Herbert, after he had reconnoitred the couple for a long time through his glass, "but it seems to me, Mary, that those two young people are now walking hand-in-hand. Stay," and he altered the focus, "it's a fact! Why, Mary, what does this mean?" and Herbert looked with bewilderment into his wife's smiling face.

"It means, I hope, that they will walk hand-in-hand through life."

"And it also means, I think," rejoined her husband, laughing with almost his old boyish heartiness, "that, in addition to her other qualifications, I have secured a good diplomatist in my wife."

CHAPTER XIV.

O lapse of time! O flying years!
I will not reckon up the tears
That fell the while.
Nor note thy wintry doubts and fears;
But numbering thy springs—O years
Look up and smile.

FIVE years later breakfast was again laid in the library of Moreton Rectory, but the young Rector had not been out coursing as upon a former occasion, but had been engaged in tying up roses, with a handsome woman at his side who held the necessary implements and handed them to him when they were required. The library, too, had undergone a change; there were no longer scantily covered shelves, where papers and periodicals were mostly conspicuous, but from floor to ceiling, massive and very orthodox looking volumes

filled the formerly empty spaces. Helen and her mother had gone over more than once to inspect the Rectory in the weeks preceding the marriage, so clearly foreshadowed in the last chapter, and the first thing that appealed to Helen was the unclerical look of the Rector's library. Her first silent determination was, therefore, that it should be promptly furnished with books, but furnished without the Rector's knowledge as her wedding present to her husband, so that on their return from their wedding trip he might find his shelves filled with a goodly array of volumes. To accomplish this she went up to London and presented herself at a well-known ecclesiastical bookseller's, and stated her wish to be supplied with the most suitable works for a clergyman's library. The first question disconcerted her —

"What are the gentleman's views?"

"Whatever does the man mean?" thought Helen.

As she looked perplexed, the next question was put more definitely —

"Was the Rector high, or broad, or low?"

"Oh! I want a good library!" answered Helen; "not where a reader can only find

one thought expressed in different ways, but a good library; nevertheless, one especially adapted for a clergyman."

Here was a good margin.

"Was the gentleman a good classic?"

Helen, remembering who her intended husband's tutor had been, and his general success, answered promptly, "Certainly!" and the thing was done; no translations were to be admitted.

The young couple were on the pleasant shores of the Riviera whilst the library of the unconscious bridegroom was being weighted with the ponderous tomes of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, all, as Helen prided herself, being in the original Greek.

With what joyous contentment and satisfaction did the happy wife regard her husband's astonished look on the morning after their return home, as he stood in the middle of the room and gazed on his lately acquired literary wealth with amazement. He could only say —

"Why, Helen!"

"I think you will find them all there," she answered, with proud consciousness; "Tertullian, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Origen, and all the rest. I am sure I cannot re-

member half their names, and they are all in the originals; and you see they are all in the proper church binding. I hope you are pleased?"

"A man would be a stolid wretch, Helen, who was not gratified at so noble a gift; but —but—dearest, do you demand me to read them? It would take me my life."

"Of course you'll have to read them!" cried innocent Helen, putting aside his suggestion as excess of modesty; "every clergyman does. But on the other side," she said, turning him round, "you'll find the works of all the best English divines when you want a change from the Greek. Of course there are no light books here. I have had them all put into what is going to be our morning-room, along with my own books. I have a goodly array of them. We must not have breakfast here, you know, Reginald, as a rule; it would be quite like sacrilege."

"Let us breakfast here once or twice a week, Helen, if it be only that I may enjoy looking upon your generous gift."

"Well," said Helen, somewhat reluctantly, "we'll do so for the present; but, dear Reginald, do not call it a generous gift again; it's a love gift, and you'll be in their midst often

enough. All clergymen have to pass hours every day in their studies and libraries."

And this morning, following the rule then established, breakfast was laid in the library where the good Fathers reposed in peaceful, undisturbed rest.

"A letter from dear Cousin Mary!" cried Helen; "here's a treat in store for you, Reginald. What a beautiful handwriting it is!"

"I think it is perfect," said the Rector.

"And the writer *perfection*. Is it not so, Reginald? She alone does all things well."

"That is true," said the Rector; "and never so well as when she made you mine," and he looked over her shoulder as his wife broke the seal.

"Shall I read it, or shall we read it together?"

"We will read it together," answered Reginald, and sliding his left arm round her he held the letter with his right hand to steady it whilst the opposite page was in his wife's left hand, her right resting upon his shoulder. We will also, looking over both their shoulders, read with them.

"DEAREST HELEN,

"The time is approaching when, in all probability, we shall return to England as was

expected. There have been many difficulties, which at one time seemed to render that event still to be regarded as a future one, instead of being near; and these have been hindrances to my writing to you, as I wished to pause before doing so in order that I might know what plans we could decide upon making.

"Herbert and myself have well considered the matter, though doubtless you will be surprised at its requiring any consideration when the fact of his retirement, with full pension and a baronetcy, was the price held out to him before he left England; otherwise I do not think he had the intention of returning at all, as it now appears that he was most averse to bringing me here; but the bait was too much for him, dear fellow. He was so delighted at the idea of making me a Lady. Behold, wherefore, he took up this judgeship! But he regards all these things differently now. To accept a baronetcy and to leave India, retiring at the early age of thirty-five on full salary, is unprecedented. The baronetcy had no attractions for myself—quite the reverse. Had it not been for the children, and for the sake of his own health, I should have counselled staying the full term of twenty years; but our two dear little

ones could not be sacrificed, and to send them away to England—even to my darling Helen —no, it could not be; or to go with them myself and leave Herbert there alone in delicate health (for the climate of India does not suit him, he is too energetic for it, and it is wearing him out). How could I consent!

"There only appeared to us one honourable solution—to resign on account of his health and to decline the retiring pension and also the baronetcy; which we have done. I perfectly understand now the cause of the departure from ordinary rules in the case of Herbert. He works as no other man has ever worked. It is killing him. He would not have liked it to be thought that the presence of his wife had made him less arduous. Sharing this feeling, I have never discouraged his energy. It would take too long to explain to you the reasons why he is so much estimated; it will suffice to say that outside his judgeship he has rendered the Government most important services in pacifying the native Princes, arbitrating between them and settling their claims. He is, in truth, a most valuable servant, but for all that we will not clutch at the reward. I say

'we,' because I have worked with him, having been his secretary all along save when it was necessary for me to have temporary rest. Herbert is getting anxious also about me, so there is no other way.

"I have entered into all these business matters because you made some allusion in your last letter to my returning as Lady Langridge. Thank God! it will not be so. We shall have ample means for living a simple country life in England, which was always my desire. I feared lest Herbert might be disappointed if he were not *ennobled*, but he has cast all that aside quite cheerfully.

"And now, having exhausted all these dry details, I hasten to reply to a more homely but more soul-engrossing topic. I am glad to tell you that Grantham is a fine healthy boy, and is not at present affected by the climate. Herbert and myself have lately agreed to call him by his second name—Grantham—and not Reginald, as sometimes it is awkward when the little ones bear the same names as their elders; and when we return to England we hope to see a great deal of you both; and cousin Reginald will always be 'Reginald' with myself and hus-

band. I do not know how it will fare with my little girl's two legitimate names—'Margaret Brereton,' for she is only called 'Marygold' here. Herbert loses all his careworn looks when this child is present. He delights in driving his fingers through her hair, and making it stand up all round her face, which it readily does, as it is more wavy, or rather frizzly, than my own, which you know always objected to lie down; and the child's hair is in fact literally like crisped gold threads from the very roots. I suppose I have heard a hundred times dear Herbert's delighted exclamation, 'What else is she but a marygold!' after he has succeeded in making it stand out like rays around her fair little face, where the blue eyes laugh out from the midst of the living aureole. Forgive me, darling; you are yourself a fond mother, and know the garrulous weakness appertaining to such individuals. Talking of 'Marygold,' carries me to Margaret Brereton, her godmother by proxy. I had a letter from the dear girl only yesterday, in which there were also a few lines to Herbert from the father. She is carrying on the work of the Marygold Guild bravely, and helps her father in every way, studying always with

him. How glad I am for her father's sake! —a holy man, Helen, and a true. I long for you and Reginald to know him.

"I cannot write any more, as being still secretary, I have much work on my hands. Kindest regards from both to dear cousin Reginald, and much love to yourself, from your cousin

"MARY.

"Just a few words to say that I know nothing about the exquisite water-colour drawing you speak of as found in Dr. Grantham's portfolio, labelled in the doctor's handwriting as 'Nausikaa,' which Mr. Ashcroft has secured, thinking that it must be a portrait of myself when a girl. I was certainly at no time drawn in the character of Nausikaa, nor playing with a ball, although I was very fond of that simple sport in my girlish days. Dear Dr. Grantham, I remember, had an especial admiration for that young Homeric princess, so much so, that in his last moments, when his mind was wandering, and speech had almost failed, I heard him in broken accents murmur 'Nausikaa.'"

THE END.

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